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# A Tale Told by an Idiot

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R P Noronha

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*Noronha*

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R. P. NORONHA

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*Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player  
That struts and frets this hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.*

(Macbeth, Act V Scene 5)

Well, and so is history. In a sense, this book is a worm's eye view of thirty-five years of mini-history as seen by an individual at the grass-roots level. I do not appear in it any more than is necessary for continuity, but I have tried to recreate the atmosphere of the times in which I worked and played. Read on, and I hope you will at least be amused.

R.P. NORONHA

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## I. THE END OF THE BEGINNING

I got into the I.C.S. in pleasantly casual fashion. When I went to England, my mother had impressed on me the need to appear for the competitive examination, which I had no intention of doing (my heart was set on a career as a photo-journalist). After I had refrained from taking my first shot at the exam, my mother lost patience—and also perhaps some of her abounding faith in an only child and sent me all the forms and certificates duly filled up for the I.C.S. She also indicated delicately that if I did not appear, my allowance would die a sudden death. I appeared; much to my surprise, I got in. Even more to my surprise, I topped the list of Indian candidates, and ever since then I have had no faith in competitive examinations.

I had mentioned the Central Provinces and Berar as my first preference, largely because of the *shikar*, and was lucky enough to get it. After a month's leave I was appointed Assistant Commissioner, Nagpur towards the end of 1939. The main object of this posting at the provincial capital was to enable me to meet all the top brass—or to enable them to assess me—before I was sent to a district. The I.C.S. cadre in the Central Provinces at Nagpur was at the time almost equally divided between British and Indians and I had the first of a long series of experiences of schisms, not only between British and Indian, but between Indian and Indian and between British and British officers. The Indians had by now refused to be merely tolerated in the Great White Society. They had been permitted to join the white club (the C.P. Club) but without

voting rights, an intolerable situation. The response of the senior Indian officers was to get together and raise a loan, with which they built the Gondwana Club, a purely Indian club where entry of Europeans was banned. The Gondwana club was delightfully situated on a hill in the Hazarī Pahar area, and was so much superior to the old and rather bedraggled C.P. club that it must have aroused a certain amount of bitterness amongst the British officers. Since the two clubs were mutually exclusive, the British and the Indian officers met each other in their offices and sometimes at their homes, but never in their clubs! The social courtesies were however observed, and in accordance with them I called on all my seniors, without regard to colour. The care with which they scrutinized me recalled the *Jungle Book*, "Look well, ye wolves!" I did feel rather like a wolf cub being sniffed over by the pack.

The Chief Secretary of the day was Chandulal Trivedi, a brilliant man who had already made his mark in a service that was not exactly staffed by idiots. The Governor's Secretary was R.N. Bannerji, who was equally outstanding in his own way. Unfortunately, the two of them were at loggerheads for reasons which I was never able to appreciate. Unfortunately for me, Bannerji had the better cook so that I was more often at his place than at Trivedi's. All that saved me from being stamped a "Bannerji man" was my utter unimportance. But well wishers dropped a hint or two and I curbed the cravings of my stomach.

Then came my posting as Assistant Commissioner in Sagar district of Jabalpur division, and with it this story really begins.

## II

1940 was a peculiar year. The popular ministries in the provinces had already resigned on the outbreak of the war, in response to a mandate from the Congress High Command. The Central Provinces, like others, came under Governor's rule. At first sight, this was merely a return to the form of government that had prevailed before provincial autonomy was accepted by the Congress. But the reality was quite differ-

ent. Before the popular ministry took over in 1937, it was the done thing to revere the Raj and parade one's loyalty like a banner—with an eye of course to an eventual Rai Sahib or Diwan Bahadur title. Two years of Congress rule quickly established a new set of norms. It was the done thing now to parade one's patriotism and, if possible, a third cousin twice removed who had been to jail in the civil disobedience movement. I did quite well out of the fact that Sarojini Naidu was my godmother (real not fairy).

By the time the Congress went and the Governor returned to the saddle, everyone had realized that the British Raj was not a permanent fixture. An era of ambivalence was ushered in, of riding two horses with one bottom, of lip service in private to the ideals of the Congress, and contributions to the Viceroy's War Purposes Fund in public. At one village, I was unable to hire labour for pitching my tent because it was a Congress village. But after I and my *chaprasi* had finished the job, the *malguzar* dropped in to see me and I stung him for a contribution of Rs 100 to the War Fund. Years later, I was to see the same sort of ambivalence when the Congress was on its way out.

I want to be honest about my own attitude. During the interview for the I.C.S. I was asked "Tell me, Mr Noronha, apart from the salary, what attracted you to the I.C.S.?" I replied with another question "Apart from the salary, is there any attraction?" I saw myself as a mercenary, serving any government that chose to pay me, loyally and within the limits imposed by a robustly practical conscience. It was at about this time that Mahatmaji called the Government servants "rice soldiers". I had no objection to being a rice soldier, with, of course, a little bit of chicken thrown in. To my mind, everyone who serves for money is a rice soldier and he has nothing to be ashamed of, provided he sells only his sword and not his honour. And wasn't it the rice soldiers about whom Housman wrote:

Whom God abandoned, they defended  
And saved the sum of things for pay?

In 1940 and often in later years, mine was an attitude that

did not make for popularity. It was essentially the attitude of a follower and, in a country where everyone sees himself as a leader, followers cannot be popular. Englishmen at the Club were not amused when I said that inefficiency in the ruler was a boon to the ruled, long live George VI! On the other hand, my Congress friends—yes, I had them too—were irritated when I suggested that the members of the Viceroy's Council were more intelligent than the out-of-work politicians; they at least were paid for doing what most of the others were doing without payment, keeping their mouths shut.

Amongst the Indian members of the services there was another form of ambivalence. Already suspect because they had been recruited by the British, they tried to Indianize themselves by methods that were faintly comic. Some began to keep two cooks, one for preparing English food and the other for making Indian food. Since no one could afford two good cooks, both were usually incompetent and I did not look forward to dining out. A craze sprang up for silver *thalis*, and there were senior officers whose bones creaked as they lowered themselves on to Indian style latrines after twenty years of reading the morning newspaper on an old-fashioned thunder-box. But they served faithfully, these rice soldiers, as their predecessors had served Chandragupt and Akbar and Shivaji and Dalhousie, as they themselves had served Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, the Congress Premier, only a few months ago.

The whole atmosphere made it obvious that, for the British Raj, this was the end of the beginning, the end of the first phase of decline leading to an eventual fall. It was equally obvious that it was the end of the beginning of the rise of a new power, the Congress. Between 1857 and 1927 no political party had any rural backing worthy of the name. Their support came from the towns, their leaders were urban in origin, when they reached out into the villages they evoked no enthusiasm. Jallianwala Bagh could not have occurred in any one of Punjab's villages, it was only an urban audience that would respond to the call of the Nationalists. But in the decade prior to 1937-38 the Congress had built up a massive rural following by winning over the key figures in the villages. In order to understand how this was achieved we will first

have to understand the rural setup. From Ashoka onwards, the sole owner of land has always traditionally been the state, that is, the king. To this day, Section 57 of the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code declares that "All lands belong to the State Government" and Section 58 concludes the matter by saying "All land . . . is liable to the payment of revenue to the State Government." In 1857 there was no state, only the king, whether of Delhi or Avadh or of a tiny little hill territory made no difference, he was the king and the land was his. He might appoint intermediaries to administer it but in the final analysis he was the owner. All the rest, the feudal chief, the *jagirdar*, the *malguzar*, the *zamindar*, call him what you will, were merely lessees of the king. This concept of land being the property of the king and within his gift enormously strengthened his position *vis-a-vis* even the greatest of his subjects. Whenever an intermediary died there had to be a fresh grant from the king or the next immediately superior intermediary, usually at a price, a perpetual reminder of where the real ownership lay.

The same concept of proprietorship had existed in feudal England. It took the beheading of one king and the banishment of another to get rid of it, but by the time the English came to India they had got rid of it and they therefore understood only imperfectly the Indian idea of ownership. Whenever they wheedled a land grant from the Nawab of Bengal or the Grand Rebel, they proceeded to treat it as if they were absolute proprietors. When they really did become absolute proprietors in place of the former rulers, they applied the English concept of ownership to their own intermediaries. They gave them the right to transfer, to partition, to inherit without previous permission, in short they converted the Indian *malguzar* into an English squire. But they did not succeed in buying his loyalty. When the British had their bad times in 1857 the village proprietors, by and large, fought for the old gods and the old kings. They lost, of course, and *vae victis* became the watchword. They lost their villages, often they lost their lives, frequently they became hewers of wood and drawers of water, at the very least they bowed out of history. In their place new intermediaries were appointed, men who owed everything to the British and whose existence

depended on them. In the Central Provinces, the intermediary at the village level was the *malguzar*. The tenants held from him, although the maximum rent he could charge was fixed and there were other safeguards against exploitation. A certain proportion of the rent, known as the land revenue, had to be paid to the state. It was a good system on the whole, and most of the *malguzars* were liked and respected.

In Berar, where the *ryotwari* system prevailed, the tenant or *ryot* paid his dues to the Government through a *patel* appointed by the administration. The office of *patel* was considered of such importance that appointments were made under the direct authority of the provincial government and those persons were selected who had the greatest influence and power in the village. *Patelship* was hereditary and greatly prized. For all practical purposes, the *patel* functioned as the *malguzar* in Berar.

The *malguzar* or (in Berar) the *patel* was the key figure at the village level. While the rights of the *malguzar* were hereditary, partible and alienable, those of the *patel* were only hereditary. While the *malguzar* had a direct stake in the prosperity of the village since he derived his income from it, the *patel* had only his own farm land. With each succeeding generation the *malguzar* grew weaker as the result of partition, his share in the proprietary rights shrank from one hundred percent to fifty to ten to five and sometimes to one. Similarly the *patel's* lands were distributed amongst his heirs, generation after generation, until the wealth and status which had brought the *patelki* into the family in the first instance remained only as memories. I have never been able to understand why the British did not apply the law of primogeniture to their intermediaries as they had applied it to the princes. Their failure to do so eventually divested the office of *malguzar/patel* of its viability. The poorer they became, the less able were they to withstand a succession of bad crops or a slump in agricultural prices.

Then came the recession. It hit agriculture and therefore the village intermediary particularly hard, that very class of persons who were the core of British support in the country, who had steadfastly prevented the Nationalist movement from establishing its roots in the countryside. When the *malguzar*

came upon his hard times in the decade preceding 1938, the British Raj did nothing to help him. With a blind and incredibly foolish adherence to the letter of the law, the British allowed these men, whose ancestors had got their villages for loyalty and faithful service, to be sold up by their creditors when a little amendment to the revenue law could have saved them. Worse, many villages were sold for arrears of land revenue or *taccavi* by the Government itself. India, which has seen many kinds of madness in the four thousand years of its history, stood aghast at *this* madness, but in silence, for "who shall teach a mad man the name of his father?"

After dispossession the *ex-malguzar* became merely a tenant, one of the most, if not the most, influential in the village, and one who harboured a bitter grievance against the British. The new type of *malguzar*, had no roots in the soil and not much influence. If he had any sympathies at all, these lay with the Congress. Nor was he inclined to use his position in furtherance of the interests of the Raj at the cost of colliding with the *ex-malguzars*. British influence, or Government influence, rapidly declined in the rural areas. An old *Thakur*, who was—and still is—a dear personal friend, put the matter succinctly, "what do I owe the *Sarkar* which forgot me when I was drowning in my debts?" To these persons the Congress made many promises, it was these persons who built up its prestige, and it was through them that the Congress built up their influence in the rural areas, an influence they had never possessed before.

In 1937 a Congress Government came into power at the provincial level, and the members of the Legislative Assembly, overwhelmingly Congress, took care to keep their supporters happy. For the first time the *ex-malguzar* and the tenant both realized that they could get what they wanted far more effectively through the M.L.A. rather than through the *Tehsildar*. But a careful distinction was always drawn between the Government and the Congress, a distinction which continues to be drawn to this day. It was always "The Congress has given you so-and-so" and never "The Government has given you this." The emphasis was—and still is—on building up the image of the party, not the image of the Administration. Consequently in 1940, with the British Raj back in power, we faced a curious state of affairs since we represented the *Sarkar*

which was now a forgotten word. We ruled without friends, maintaining law and order because no one seriously desired a breakdown of law and order, collecting Government dues because no one wanted to withhold them, and assuming goodwill in the people when it did not exist. *Ceteris paribus*, a bureaucratic administration, however efficient, does not appeal to the hearts of men—it is far too impersonal. And equally impersonal was the peoples' reaction, they looked through us as if we were just not there. I admired the British officers for their behaviour in this depressing situation. They never let it appear that they were anything but supremely confident about their ability to rule, about the outcome of the war, about their own future. But the writing on the wall was very clear and all of them could read.

I was attached for training to the Sub-divisional Officer, Rehli, a man who had started his career as a *naib tehsildar*. He promised that he would coach me for my departmental examinations, but after I had failed once I looked for guidance elsewhere. I learned much from him that was to be useful in my future career, all the tricks of the lazy officer which must be detected during inspection. Periodically he cleared his files by marking them to the *tehsildar* for enquiry and report. He was also an expert in dismissing cases in default, taking pains to call a case as soon as he saw that the applicant had gone to the urinal. His field inspections were made without ever visiting a field, with the help of the village map and the *patwari*. And yet, he got on reasonably well with the Raj; if he was not promoted, neither was he dismissed. The Deputy Commissioner was Farquhar, a fat man with a brain, but no pressing desire to use it. He did, however, have a sense of humour. "Look here, my boy, if you have average intelligence, about half the things you do are bound to be right, which is a fair achievement for any career. Don't spend sleepless nights over them."

The Commissioner was Greenfield, an outstanding officer of strong likes and even stronger dislikes. When I was doing my forest training, I spent four days after a very notorious man-eating panther and eventually killed it by setting myself out as the bait. I was rather proud of my achievement and mentioned it in the tour diary that had to accompany my T.A. bill to the

Commissioner. Farquhar forwarded it without comment, he was not addicted to reading routine papers. Back it came, unpassed, with the remark that "The Assistant Commissioner is not paid to shoot panthers, man-eating or otherwise." I should have let the matter rest, but I was young and foolish. I sent it back with the reply. "The Commissioner's attention is invited to Revenue Book Circular so-and-so, according to which it is one of the duties of a revenue officer to destroy man-eating and cattle-lifting animals." When Farquhar saw this, he sent for me. "Don't be brash, Noronha, old Greenfield doesn't like it." But I insisted on the bill going back to the Commissioner, and much to my surprise it was returned passed, without comment. A month later, Greenfield came on inspection to Sagar and Farquhar was worried. He said "For God's sake go over your office with a fine toothcomb, if he finds the least little bit wrong you've had it." I was worried too, and even more so when I got a chit from Greenfield asking me to see him in the Circuit House at seven in the evening. He came out as soon as he got my card and his first words quelled the butterflies in my stomach, "Come in and have a drink. So you are the chap who reads the Revenue Book Circulars. Tell me all about the panther." I learned then that if the administration was impersonal with the people, it was warm and human with its members.

Greenfield went as Adviser to the Governor, and his place was taken by Jayaratnam. In those days, young officers were paternally watched, in the nicest sense of the word, to see that they did not go beyond the bounds of propriety and good sense. Sagar was an Army station and with a constant stream of new arrivals at the Small Arms Training School, life was on the gay side. It was also expensive for a junior officer with my tastes. I kept two horses and rode with the Tent Club, I had a pair of bull terriers, and I was mad keen on *shikar*. My pay was not proof against all these demands and I soon realized that if I was to avoid bankruptcy, something had to be done. So I turned on the old charm, full blast, and got my mother to come and live with me. That solved my problems. I gave her my pay at the beginning of the month and she met all the bills. But Jayaratnam did not know about my financial arrangements. All he knew, and very positively, was that I was

living well beyond my means. The next time I was in Jabalpur, the Divisional headquarters, he wined and dined me with his usual large heartedness. After dinner, he asked casually "By the way, have you had any difficulty in making both ends meet?" I said I had not, which was perfectly true, with my mother to balance the books. Jayaratnam looked doubtful. "Are you sure? Someone mentioned that your club bills were on the high side, *and* your mess bills." I kept quiet, wondering which rule I had broken now. "Look, Noronha, don't get into debt, for Heaven's sake, it's a habit you'll never get out of. If you're stumped, let me know the amount and I'll see if I can help." I was deeply touched at this unexpected kindness, and blurted out the whole story of my deficit financing. He laughed, and there the matter ended. Looking back, I think the greatest advantage the I.C.S. had over the I.A.S. was the possession of men like Jayaratnam.

## II. THE PHONEY WAR

We had our phony war too. It started with Britain's but lasted longer, culminating in the 1942 movement, which for all practical purposes ended in Dunkirk fashion hardly ten days after it started.

Although the Congress ministries had resigned on the outbreak of the war with Germany, no one in the High Command ever dreamt of supporting Hitler. Apart from the Iron Man (the *Sardar*)—who sensibly kept his views to himself—almost every top leader condemned the Fascists and the Nazis and the systems they represented. Mahatmaji began the war with tears at the thought of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament being reduced to ruins. Jawaharlal Nehru had seen the handiwork of Il Duce and Der Fuehrer in Spain at the time of the Civil War and was typically outspoken about his feelings. The ideological hostility towards the Axis Powers generated a sneaking sympathy for the British, which militated against active opposition towards them. And I suppose everyone—except perhaps Subhas Bose—realized that if the Axis won, freedom would be pushed back a hundred years. A situation like this could result in only one thing—stalemate. It did. A token *Satyagraha* movement was started, carefully planned so that it would cause minimum embarrassment to the Raj. First, a notice that someone would arrive on a certain day to court arrest, then the man himself with a flag and a tail of enthusiastic onlookers, the provocation, the arrest, the trial and finally a six months rest cure in jail. I doubt if anyone really knew what it was all about, what this symbolic defiance

of the law was intended to prove. Some said that it was training of the lower leadership in the science of non-violent resistance, others that Mahatmaji had astutely got rid of the turbulent spirits who were champing at the bit. The movement fizzled out and its passing was unsung, unnoticed. The rank and file of Congressmen sat twiddling their thumbs and lamenting the lush days of cakes and ale when they had been in power. The Raj moved in stately fashion down the streets of Time like a London bobby, maintaining law and order, collecting land revenue and engrossed in all the tremendous trifles that make up administration.

By now I was the Subdivisional Officer of four *tehsils* in Sagar district and my people interested me far more than the goings on of political high society. Then began my love affair with the Central Provinces which later on became Madhya Pradesh, a love affair that was to last for thirty-five years, and will last until the end of my life. The Madhya Pradeshis are meticulous about letting others live. His business is in the hands of Marwaris and U.P. banias, Sindhis and Punjabis; he is content to watch them make their fortunes while he himself cultivates the gracious art of living. He is not really lazy, it is just that the scramble for existence seems to him to be crude and undignified and not befitting the status of the original son of the soil, which is of course what he is. Anyone who cannot trace his origins back at least a thousand years is not a real Madhya Pradeshis. The real Madhya Pradeshis is the Gond (there are at least fifteen sub-clans), the Savara or Sonr (the *n* is only a nasal), the Kamhar, the Bhil, and twenty other *Adivasi* tribes. The real Madhya Pradeshis is the Bundhela and Baghela Rajput, the Lodhi and Dangi, the Kurmi and Rawat, the Satnami and Basor. And they all have one thing in common, the ability to stand back and look at life with amused detachment, to enjoy it without becoming involved, although in other respects they are as different from each other as black is from white.

Perhaps this attitude stems from age . . . Madhya Pradesh is very old, it was old when the Himalayas were being formed. The old and experienced peoples of the world tend to be tolerant and slightly cynical, they neither praise nor blame with more than half a breath. Whatever the reason, Madhya

Pradesh is the only state in India where I have found absolutely no prejudice against the outsider *qua* outsider; they accept you or they reject you on your own merits and not on your origins. Here at least the sins of the fathers are not visited on the children. It is not merely that the outsider is tolerated, he is never made to feel that he is an outsider. Some of the most respected names in Madhya Pradesh are Sen, Bannerji and Sardar Singh, Seth and Mal, and they all merge harmoniously into the landscape.

Two of the *tehsils* of my subdivision were heavily infested by dacoits and many farmers left their land and took refuge in the nearest town. But not the little local *bania*. He stuck to his tiny shop in the middle of nowhere, making a modest profit out of everyone, including the dacoits. When they thought he had made enough they looted him but the idea of abandoning his vocation just never entered his head; he collected the remnants of his stock-in-trade and started all over again. He was indestructible and dacoit-proof, he blamed no one and resented no one, he had worked out a *modus vivendi* of which Bertrand Russell might well have been proud.

The villages were delightful. Almost everyone was poor but no one was very much poorer than anyone else and there was usually enough to eat. A common sight was the large earthenware pot (*matka*) hanging in the veranda of the slightly better house. It was kept filled with buttermilk and every passer-by had the right to help himself, free of course, with the large wooden spoon that was hanging beside it, a spoon that held about a breakfast cup full. One poured from the spoon into a cupped palm, and so drank. The privilege was available even to the lowest castes, but in their case someone from the house poured the buttermilk and they did not touch the pot or the spoon. I equated myself, naturally, with the lowest caste!

The agricultural labourer was paid four annas a day, the equivalent of three seers of wheat at the time. If he elected to take his wages in kind—and most of them did—he received four seers of wheat, part of which he promptly exchanged for coarser grains. Today he gets four rupees a day and is lucky if he can buy two seers of wheat with it. It was an age of shortage of money but abundance of goods, at least of the things

which the poor man needed. At four in the morning when it was still dark, the grinding wheels began to moan, preparing flour for the day. An hour later, at earliest dawn, the men began to trickle out of their huts, the cattle were unpenned, and the exodus to the fields began. Well before sunrise the bullocks were humped against their yokes and the clean earth was sliding off the *bakhar* blades to the accompaniment of snatches of song. By the time the pale October sun had warmed the village, the women had cooked a snack for their men and delivered it in the fields. Then, at dusk, the return, cattle lowing, a shrill woman bad-temperedly settling the hash of some unfortunate child, the smell of cowdung fires, the murmur of conversation and, at last, silence. There was poverty, there was hardship, but also there was peace and a quiet happiness.

The rural economy illustrated a kind of Gresham's law. So far as the land was concerned, the bad man tended to drive out the good one. An illiterate farmer took a loan for his daughter's wedding, and that was the end of him... he was never able to repay the debt or to work it off, ultimately a part of the whole of his land was transferred to the creditor under the guise of sale. The revenue law attempted to protect the cultivator through various provisions, but they were invariably evaded and the only protection that remained was an unintended one, protection against perfectly legitimate Government debts, which became difficult to collect. I had a *tehsildar* who evolved an ingenious, and on the whole, unobjectionable method of collecting government dues. He would camp in a village, the primary school being vacated for his use, and send for the 'principle defaulter. He was greeted with courtesy on arrival, and a few minutes passed in polite conversation. Suddenly he would hear the sound of someone being beaten with a shoe in the adjoining room, and screams for mercy. "Don't beat me, ohhh, I'm dying, enough, enough, I'll pay!" and then, quiet. They say a word to a wise man will suffice. In this case even the word was not required, the defaulter went home thoughtfully and soon afterwards his dues, or a substantial part of them, reached the *tehsildar's*. He never discovered that the next room contained only the *tehsildar chaprasi*, belabouring the wall with a shoe, and indulging his histrionic talents in the role of a debtor.

## II

Both 1940 and 1941 were years of political frustration, Mahatma Gandhi and Linlithgow, Linlithgow and Mahatma Gandhi. Two years of meetings and communiques and letters published by way of reproach, two undisputed leaders heavy-footing towards nowhere. A dispute can be resolved if both parties to it want a solution, it can even be resolved if only one party wants a solution badly enough. Here neither party wanted a solution forthwith or in the near future. Political exigencies demanded that they should show themselves to be eager for a solution and they did, they went through all the motions of rapprochement, being careful to stop short every time it appeared within sight. The technique was simple. Linlithgow would turn down an obviously reasonable demand. Mahatmaji would counter by making an obviously unreasonable one. There was no reason why the British should concede any substantial measure of independence. India, under their control, was already contributing magnificently towards the war effort. Congress support for the war could not increase that effort. On the other hand, if it was half-hearted it might well cause a reduction in the contribution. A party that had opposed the British for thirty years, a party that had resigned on the issue of declaring war without their consent, could hardly be expected to give unequivocal support to the war effort as the result of some miraculous overnight change of heart. Then there was also the question of efficiency. The Congress, with barely a year's experience of governing—and that in the Provinces, not in the Centre—was still an amateur in the art of administration. The British could not afford a breakdown on the Indian home front.

On his side, Mahatmaji was perfectly aware of the Indian dislike of Hitler and his kind, and of the latent sympathy for the British, which I have mentioned earlier. Jawaharlal Nehru had said bluntly that any embarrassment of the British when they were fighting for survival would amount to a stab in the back. The views of the rest of the High Command in the matter of stabs in the back are not known, but they also were averse to any form of direct action at this stage; in fact it must have been partly due to their gentle prodding that

Mahatmaji kept up his interminable dialogue with Linlithgow. In his own mind, however, the issues were clear cut and definite; he would not compromise with the dogma of non-violence, and therefore there could be no question of his being a party, even indirectly, to any war. That settled the issue of Congress cooperation with the war effort.

Curiously enough, Hitler's early victories in Europe, even Dunkirk, did not have much impact on the Indian scene. These were White men fighting white men, the coloured races were not involved, it had nothing to do with *us*. But in 1941 Japan entered the war with a bang, Pearl Harbour went up in flames, the American Pacific fleet was crippled, in quick succession Bataan and many places that had never figured even in High School geography questions, hit the headlines. For the first time in modern history a coloured race was making the white man's burden unbearable. The fact that Japan was an avowedly imperialistic nation made no difference, imperialism was all right so long as the Emperor was coloured. We identified ourselves with Japan, we beat up the whites by proxy, for once black was beautiful. Being ruled eats into the bone, and the ruler has only to suffer a reverse for the ruled to turn on him like a pack of wolves, as they had turned on Napoleon, as they were to turn on Hitler. But the worst—or the best, depending on how you looked at it—was yet to come.

In early 1942 Japan occupied Singapore, Malaya and Burma, took over the Andaman islands, wiped out the air defence of Ceylon, and suddenly the war was lapping at our shores. Subhas Bose, who had been jockeyed out of the Congress by Mahatmaji, appeared in riding boots and a forage cap as the leader of the Indian National Army, a force raised from Indian prisoners of war, and recognized by Japan as an army of liberation. Overnight he became a hero again and the tricolour flag he had adopted became the flag of India in the hearts of men. Mahatmaji sat up and took notice. The fact that he had been responsible for Bose's exit from the Congress was not important, he had nothing against him personally. What was important was the reason why he had manouevered him out and that reason was still valid. In the whole history of the world, no nation has ever achieved freedom by trading one master for another, even temporarily. Bose's thesis was that

India could. If we helped the Axis, they would reward us with freedom after they had defeated the Allies. It was as simple as that. Only it was not true, it was a naive belief that Napoleon had fostered and disproved with brutal frankness during the Continental wars. But Bose held it, and the people were marshalling themselves behind him as far back as 1939 to 1940. That was the main reason why he had to go. Now he was back in the limelight, and again the people were dazzled by his image, the liberator on a white horse, a rather incongruous Joan of Arc. If, as at the time seemed probable, the Japanese succeeded in making a successful invasion of the country, they would accept Subhas Bose as its sole representative, and he would accept their ideas about the co-prosperity sphere and India's place in it. That must not happen, at all costs that must not happen. When the Japanese came—if they came—they must find a strong and well-knit Congress that had already opposed the British openly if not violently, and had taken over the administration when the British retreated. And that, in a nutshell, was the genesis of the 1942 movement.

The whirligigs of time forced Mahatmaji's hand. Left to himself, he would have continued his stately minuet with Linlithgow but time was running out. Overnight, the whole tone of his utterances changed. He asked the British to withdraw entirely from India. "Leave us to God or to chaos," "this is an open rebellion," and finally "do or die!" But he did not organize anything more than *satyagraha*. Nevertheless, by May 1942 there was thunder in the air. Nothing had actually happened but the whole country felt that something was about to happen, a feeling which forces things to happen. The whole country, however, did not include the British. As in 1857, they were singularly insensitive to atmosphere. Sir H. Twynam, who was the Governor of the Central Provinces, wrote to Linlithgow "The expectation which I expressed in my letter, dated the 24th December, that the amnesty had given the *Satyagraha* movement its quietus for the time being has now been fulfilled. If experience of previous non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements may be trusted, I should be surprised if *Satyagraha* is revived earlier than the end of the war, as promised by Gandhi, because enthusiasm for this kind of self sacrifice is seldom long lived and some

preparation is required before a movement of this kind can be launched." (*The Transfer of Power, 1942-47.*) This being the happy state of affairs, we made no contingency plans for dealing with the 1942 movement. We did prepare lists of people to be arrested, but these were confined to the front rank of Congress office-bearers and did not contain a single one of those who were to prove to be the real backbone of the agitation. For 1942, like 1857, was to be the year of the little man, of Maganlal Bagdi following in the footsteps of the Brigadier's butler at the Delhi Ridge.

I was transferred as Subdivisional Officer of Khamgaon, an independent subdivision of Buldana district in Berar, exercising all the powers of the Deputy Commissioner, but under his distant eye. Khamgaon was a stronghold of militant Hinduism, represented by the Hindu Mahasabha. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, a volunteer organization, was alleged to be the sword-arm of the Hindu Mahasabha. I rather liked these young men who had a passion for physical fitness and discipline, all too rare in our country. They had, too, a fanatical preoccupation with the past as if they were always looking back over their shoulders. They used to practise a very formalized type of *lathi* play, with much leaping about and a prodigal expenditure of energy. When I asked if the technique could not be improved upon, the group leaders were shocked—their art came from the Shastras and surely *they* could not be improved upon. One of them made the mistake of claiming that a good *lathi* wielder could not even be hit by a stone, so perfect was his defence. I asked if I could try, and after some slight hesitation, permission was granted. The group leader was very good indeed, but not good enough to beat a stone. Later on I fenced with them—I had done a fair amount of work with the foils and again I found that their emphasis on the edge left them open to the simplest thrust in *carte*.

Even at that time there was a controversy as to whether the RSS was a political organization. Personally I felt it was not—at least not *qua* RSS. I certainly did not come across any active member taking part in politics, possibly because the vigorous drills and exercises left little energy for other pastimes. They had no roots in the villages, their membership was mostly urban Brahmin or Bania; the sturdy Maratha

kept—and still keeps—aloof from the RSS. The two men responsible for the creation of the RSS were Hedgewar and Golwalkar, both Maharashtrian Brahmins. I have noticed that physical fitness and the concept of violence have a fascination for precisely those who are unlikely to master either. Women are the most vocal in any war. But these kids of the RSS were at least clean and alert, they carried themselves proudly, and they had conquered their fear. I liked them.

Khamgaon—and the whole of Berar—spoke Marathi. The area had come to the Nizam of Hyderabad at the time of the breakup of the Maratha empire, but it did not remain with him very long. At the time of Lord Curzon it was, for all practical purposes, ceded to the British to pay the cost of maintaining a British force in Hyderabad territory. The inhabitants had never looked upon themselves as subjects of the Nizam, and the changeover to British rule was smooth. The Maratha cultivator was an abiding joy to me. I did a lot of touring on horseback, travelling light, and got to know him well and he admitted me to his friendship. There were three *tehsils* in the subdivision but the volume of criminal work was not much. At first I gave the credit for this to the law-abiding nature of the people. I was wrong. I soon discovered that the Police sub-Inspectors in charge of *thanas* handed over the vast majority of minor crimes to informal village *panchayats*, and forced them to dispose of the cases. Justice was done quickly and cheaply and the crime statistics remained respectable because the offences were never registered.

During one of my tours I came across a Cheeta Pardhi, who attached himself to me and was the source of some embarrassment a couple of years later. I was camping in a village in Jalgaon *tehsil*, enjoying my first cup of tea for the day, when there was an uproar. A leopard had overslept in a *juar* field and had mauied the first two men who entered it early in the morning. I went to look for him, armed with a ten-foot hog spear which is quite the best medicine for a leopard in close cover where visibility is nil. There is a knack to handling the spear, it is rested butt against the ground, anchored by an instep and angled towards the charging leopard, which, if all goes well, impales itself on the point. The Cheeta Pardhi accompanied me into the *juar*, unnoticed, and it was my good

luck that he did so. The leopard charged, my point was off centre, it entered the leopard's belly instead of its chest, and I would have been in serious trouble if the Pardhi had not speared it. The Pardhis are a nomadic tribe who live by hunting and trapping, and perhaps a little dacoity on the side. I engaged him as my permanent *shikari*, and for a time all went well. He was a superb tracker and did not know the meaning of fear. Unfortunately, I could not go on *shikar* every day and after a few months my Pardhi found time hanging on his hands. He started a small but very efficient gang of dacoits and was ultimately caught, tried, and sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment. My friends made tactless and pointed enquiries about how much I had charged him for the custody of the stolen property. But when he completed his sentence he searched me out—I was posted in Nagpur at the time—and asked for his old job as if there was nothing unusual about the request. I gave it to him.

And so time passed. There was no opposition to the Raj, neither was there support. Our intelligence reports indicated a lull in political activities at the district level. The *juar* and cotton were in good condition, the cultivator was as happy as he could ever permit himself to be—the rural gods hate optimism—and I shot a couple of tigers.

### III

The ides of March—more properly, August 1942—approach, and it is time to take stock before the curtain rolls up on the play. I have propounded an unusual theory for the 1942 movement and the reader is entitled to ask for evidence. Let the first witness be Subhas Bose himself. The extracts that follow are from his book *The Indian Struggle—1920 . . . 1942* (Asia Publishing House, New York). The book is hastily written and is valuable for precisely this very reason; it contains first opinions, and first opinions are generally the honest ones.

The breach between the writer and the Gandhi wing was now wide, though not visible to the public. At the Presidential election in January 1939 he was therefore vigorously opposed by the Gandhi wing as well as by Pandit Nehru.

Nevertheless, he was victorious with a comfortable majority. This was the first time since 1923-24 that the Mahatma suffered a public defeat, and in his weekly paper, *Harijan*, he openly acknowledged the defeat. . . . In March 1939, at the annual session of the Congress, the writer, who presided, made a clear proposal that the Indian National Congress should immediately send an ultimatum to the British Government demanding Independence within six months and should simultaneously prepare for a national struggle. This proposal was opposed by the Gandhi wing and by Nehru and was thrown out. Thus a situation arose in which though the writer was the President of the Congress, his lead was not accepted by that body (p. 332).

As far back as 1939, it is Subhas Bose who calls for a national struggle and the Mahatma who opposes it. There are already signs of jockeying for power, signs which become clearer as time passes.

The negotiations between Mahatma Gandhi and the writer revealed that on the one side, the Gandhi wing would not follow the lead of the writer and that, on the other, the writer would not agree to be a puppet President. There was consequently no other alternative but to resign the Presidentship. This the writer did on the 29th April 1939, and he immediately proceeded to form a radical and progressive party within the Congress, with a view to rallying the entire left-wing under one banner. This party was called the Forward Bloc. Long before 1939, the writer had been convinced that an international crisis in the form of a war would break out in the near future and that India should make the fullest use of that crisis in order to win her freedom (p. 333).

The jockeying out process reaches its logical conclusion and Bose resigns. But there is more than a mere resignation. Here is the first overt hint of using the war to obtain India's freedom, and the first implication of collaboration with Britain's enemies in order to do so. We can safely presume that the implication was clear to Mahatmaji too.

Since September 1938 Mahatma Gandhi had consistently

urged that a national struggle was out of the question in the near future, while others, like the writer, who were not less patriotic than him, were equally convinced that the country was internally more ripe for a revolution than ever before, and that the coming international crisis would give India an opportunity for achieving her emancipation, which is rare in human history. When all other attempts failed, the only way left was to organise the Forward Bloc and thereby put indirect pressure on the Mahatma. This method ultimately proved to be effective. As a matter of fact, if this had not been done, Gandhi would not have altered his original attitude and would have still remained where he stood on the out-break of the war in September 1939 (p. 335).

Even great men have a capacity for wishful thinking. It was not the formation of the Forward Bloc that led to a hardening of the Congress attitude, it was the Japanese successes in the Far East after February 1942 and the emergence of Subhas Bose himself as the accepted leader of the Indian freedom struggle by the Japanese. Subhas-Bose himself admits that in 1940 and 1941, after the Forward Bloc came into being, the *satyagraha* was a halfhearted thing. "The campaign in 1940-41 was not conducted by the Mahatma with that enthusiasm and vehemence which one had seen in 1921 and again in 1930-32. Evidently Gandhi still wanted to keep the door open for a compromise—which would not be possible if too much bitterness against the British was roused in the course of the campaign" (p. 345, *ibid*).

Finally, Bose comes out in the open and reveals his grand strategy for the freedom struggle. "Firstly, Britain would lose the war and the British Empire would break up. Secondly, in spite of being in a precarious position the British would not hand over power to the Indian people and the latter would have to fight for their independence. Thirdly, India would win her independence if she played her part in the war against Britain and collaborated with those powers that were fighting Britain" (p. 345, *ibid*). It is my thesis that he held these views even in 1938, that they were known to the Mahatma, that they were the cause of Bose's ouster from power in the Congress,

and that because of them the 1942 movement became imperative once the Japanese were successful in the Far East.

Let the second and last witness take the stand. Not the Mahatma—me. I was a very junior officer, of no importance at all, but people—even quite important people—talked to me freely. I did not of course flaunt Sarojini Naidu as my god-mother but I did not exactly sweep her under the carpet either. I am quite certain that no Congressman of importance had the faintest inkling that anything like the '42 movement was going to occur. Even when the draft "Quit India" resolution appeared in the press no one started executing powers of attorney so that their property could be looked after when they went to jail. Nor were there *benami* transfers of property to forestall confiscation under the criminal law, as had invariably taken place before earlier movements. To me, as a revenue officer, the matter was clinched by the state of my land revenue and *taccavi* accounts. It had become the practice, before any important Congress movement, to refrain from paying land revenue and *taccavi* in time, so that the *Sarkar* would not occupy its mind exclusively with *satyagraha*. There was no such trend now. In fact the collections were distinctly better than normal.

But if the Congress did not want big trouble, what in heaven's name created the trouble? Well, in the first place, there was no big trouble, not when one considers the size of the country and its population. The North West Frontier Province, Punjab, Bengal, Assam and Orissa had coalition ministries and very little happened there. By and large nothing very much happened in South India either. The real trouble was confined to Bihar, U.P., part of Bombay Presidency and part of the Central Provinces and Berar. This is what the eminent historian, Dr Tara Chand, has to say in his *History of the Freedom Movement in India* which is published, incidentally, by the Publications Division of the Government of (free) India. "The widespread nature of the disturbances following the arrests of leaders on 9 August led certain quarters to conclude that this was no Congress movement, but a spontaneous rising of the people. It was nothing of the kind; the Indian people were not behind it, the Muslims, the Scheduled castes, Labour

stood entirely aloof." According to the official statistics, 763 people were killed and 1941 injured as a result of police firing. During a contiguous period of time more than three million civilians lost their lives in Russia, actively opposing the Germans. The loss caused to Government by the '42 movement was Rs 27,35,125. The pilots strike in Air India, which started in August 1974, was stated by their Chairman to have cost more than Rs 6 *crores* by September. To me, as a grass roots Indian who saw the '42 movement at close quarters, the prevailing Indian view that it was a national upsurge is offensive, just as the same contemporary British view was. A national upsurge in my country does not occupy a miniature stage.

The British were the second cause of such trouble as there was. All the Congress leaders, all the men and women to whom the organization might have listened, were arrested at the same time, leaving a vacuum—and nature abhors a vacuum. There are two ways of dealing with approaching political trouble. One is to deprive the movement of leadership before the trouble starts, but in that case *all* the people who are leaders and who are likely to become leaders have to be roped in; the arrests have to go down to the third and fourth rank of leadership. The other way is to let the situation develop so that the lines of leadership become clearer, and then—but not too late—to deprive the movement of effective leadership. Obviously there cannot be any hard and fast rule, since no two situations are exactly alike. The British elected to follow the first course but they did not go far enough. They arrested Pandit D.P. Mishra because he was the iron man of the Central Provinces and a ranking member of the All India Congress Committee, but they did not arrest Shyamlal Kashmiri who held no office in the Congress, and who, together with his friend Maganlal Bagdi, was to give far more trouble than Pandit Mishra would ever have given precisely because he was not as great a man as Pandit Mishra. The result of the British policy of neutralizing only persons of importance was to leave the field open to the more radical, the more violent, and the more adventurist elements in the Congress. It is they who gave all the trouble, such trouble as there was.

Confining arrests to well-known leaders was a matter of policy. The district officers and their superiors at the provin-

cial level had no choice in the matter. The line of action was laid down in a Top secret letter of the Government of India dated 2 August, the substance of which has been reproduced in the compilation *The Transfer of Power* published by the British Stationery Office. "No individual will be arrested merely as a member of an unlawful association, the general object being not to fill the jails but to limit the number of arrests to those regarded as essential for dislocation of the Congress organization." The Government of India in their wisdom felt that the essential people were the major office-bearers, whereas any army officer will tell you that in a battle, it is the NCO's and not the officers that count. We neutralized the Brigadier, but it was his *Khansama* that gave the trouble, as in 1857 at the Ridge. In my subdivision twenty-two Congress leaders were slated for arrest. When I next met the Commissioner—P.G. Braye—I protested. I said that none of them was likely to go in for violence, and that if violence erupted they could be relied on to oppose it. He was amused at the certainty with which I spoke. He said, "I suppose you don't want to arrest anyone, since they are all plaster saints?" My reply was "Sir, I don't want to arrest *these* twenty-two, but I have here a list of about seven hundred chaps I would very much like to pick up. There are reasons against each name. None of them is an office-bearer in the Congress." He glanced through the list and the notes I had made against each name. He nodded slowly, "If this were 1930 or even 1940, I would have given you a free hand. But it is not, it is 1942. *This* show is being run by the Government of India, my boy, carry out orders."

There is a third reason why the '42 movement got out of hand at certain times and in certain places. The British might show a brave front to the Axis, but their backs were very definitely to the wall. From their point of view it was imperative to squash the '42 movement before it assumed proportions that would require calling out the Army on a significant scale. They decided that this could best be done by making examples of those who were rash enough to defy the Raj, even of relatively harmless mobs which could have been persuaded to disperse without the use of force. Violence was used long before the crowd became violent, long before it was necessary, and as usual a chain reaction set in, for

violence begets violence. Firing was resorted to when a little patience, a little tact could well have saved the situation. Once the subordinate police officers saw which way the wind was blowing they outdid their British masters, with an eye to an eventual Rai Sahib or promotion. And they got it.

I do not wish to give the impression that every British officer was imbued with the motives I have imputed to the British as a whole. There were honourable exceptions, like Patterson in Jabalpur, and generally the British Commissioners did try to restrain the enthusiasm of their younger British district officers. The Indian officers as a whole behaved very well. They showed cold courage in facing potentially dangerous mobs and persuading them to disperse, there was no unnecessary use of force and no brutality. Our approach was not perhaps popular with our masters, but no one suffered for it. At least not obviously.

#### IV

The Quit India resolution was passed on 8 August 1942 and the amusing thing about it is that no one, including its authors, have ever allowed it to speak for itself. It was very far from being the Gita, but like the Gita it suffered from a flood of explanations, commentaries, and interpretations. It would only be fair—at least once—to let the resolution speak for itself. Here it is.

“The All-India Congress Committee has given the most careful consideration to the reference made to it by the Working Committee in their resolution dated 14 July 1942 and to subsequent events, including the development of the war situation, the utterances of responsible spokesmen of the British Government, and the comments and criticisms made in India and abroad. The Committee approves of and endorses that resolution, and is of opinion that events, subsequent to it have given it further justification and have made it clear that the immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity, both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations. The continuation of that rule is degrading and enfeebling India and making her progressively less capable of defending herself and of contributing

to the cause of world freedom.

"The Committee has viewed with dismay the deterioration of the situation on the Russian and Chinese fronts and conveys to the Russian and Chinese peoples its high appreciation of their heroism in defence of their freedom. This increasing peril makes it incumbent on all those who strive for freedom and who sympathize with the victims of aggression to examine the foundations of the policy so far pursued by the Allied Nations, which have led to repeated and disastrous failure. It is not by adhering to such aims and policies and methods that failure can be converted into success, for past experience has shown that failure is inherent in them. These policies have been based not on freedom so much as on the domination of subject and colonial countries and the continuation of the imperialist tradition and method. The possession of Empire, instead of adding to the strength of the ruling power, has become a burden and a curse. India, the classic land of modern imperialism, has become the crux of the question. By the freedom of India will Britain and the United Nations be judged and the peoples of Asia and Africa filled with hope and enthusiasm.

"The ending of British rule in this country is thus a vital and immediate issue on which depend the future of the war and the success of freedom and democracy. A free India will assure this success by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism, and Imperialism. This will not only affect materially the fortunes of the war, but will bring all subject and oppressed humanity on the side of the United Nations and give these nations, whose ally India would be, moral and spiritual leadership of the world. India in bondage will continue to be the symbol of British Imperialism and the taint of that imperialism will affect the fortunes of all the United Nations.

"The peril of today therefore necessitates the independence of India and the ending of British domination. No future promises of guarantees can affect the present situation or meet that peril. They cannot produce immediate psychological effect on the mind of the masses. Only the glow of freedom *now* can release that energy and enthusiasm of millions of people which will immediately transform the nature of the War.

"The AICC therefore repeats with all emphasis the demand for the withdrawal of the British power from India. On the declaration of India's independence a provisional government will be formed and free India will become an ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribulations of the joint enterprise of the struggle for freedom. The provisional government can only be formed with the cooperation of the principle parties and groups in the country. It will thus be a composite government, representative of all important sections of the people of India. Its primary function must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together with its allied powers, and to promote the well being of the workers in the fields and factories and elsewhere, to whom essentially all power and authority must belong. The Provisional Government will evolve a scheme for a Constituent Assembly which will prepare a constitution for the government of India, acceptable to all sections of the people. This constitution, according to the Congress view, should be a federal one with the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units and with the residuary powers vesting in these units. The future relations between India and the Allied nations will be adjusted by representatives of all these free countries conferring together for their mutual advantage and for their cooperation in the common task of resisting aggression. Freedom will enable India to resist aggression effectively with the people's united will and strength behind it.

"The freedom of India must be the symbol of, and prelude to this freedom of all other Asiatic nations under foreign domination. Burma, Malaya, Indo-China, the Dutch Indies, Iran and Iraq must also attain their complete freedom. It must be clearly understood that such of these countries as are under Japanese control now must not subsequently be placed under the rule or control of any other colonial power.

"While the AICC must primarily be concerned with the independence and defence of India in this hour of danger, the Committee is of the opinion that the future peace, security, and ordered progress of the world demand a world federation of free nations, and on no other basis can the problems of the modern world be solved. Such a world federation would ensure

the freedom of its constituent nations, prevention of aggression and exploitation by one nation over another, the protection of national minorities, the advancement of all backward areas and people, and the pooling of the world's resources for the common good of all. On the establishment of such a world federation, disarmament would be practicable in all countries, national armies, navies and air forces, would no longer be necessary, and a world federal defence force would keep the world peace and prevent aggression.

"An independent India would gladly join such a world federation and cooperate on an equal basis with other countries in the solution of international problems.

"Such a federation should be open to all nations who agree with its fundamental principles. In view of the war, however, the federation must inevitably, to begin with, be confined to the United Nations, such a step taken now will have a most powerful effect on the war, on the peoples of the Axis countries, and on the peace to come.

"The Committee regretfully realises, however, that despite the tragic and overwhelming lessons of the war and the perils that overhang the world, the governments of few countries are yet prepared to take this inevitable step towards world federation. The reactions of the British Government and the misguided criticism of the foreign press also make it clear that even the obvious demand for India's independence is resisted, though this has been made essentially, to meet the present peril and to enable India to defend herself and help China and Russia in their hour of need. The Committee is anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations. But the peril grows both to India and these nations, and inaction and submission to a foreign administration at this stage is not only degrading India and reducing her capacity to defend herself and resist aggression but is no answer to that growing peril and is no service to the peoples of the United Nations. The earnest appeal of the Working Committee to Great Britain and the United Nations has so far met with no response and the criticisms made in many foreign quarters have shown an ignorance of India's and the world's need, and sometimes even hostility

to India's freedom, which is significant of a mentality of domination and racial superiority which cannot be tolerated by a proud people conscious of their strength and of the justice of their cause.

"The AICC would yet again, at this last moment, in the interest of world freedom, renew this appeal to Britain and the United Nations. But the Committee feels that it is no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against an imperialist and authoritarian Government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity. The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last 22 years of peaceful struggle. Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken.

"The Committee appeals to the people of India to face the dangers and hardships that will fall to their lot with courage and endurance, and to hold together under the leadership of Gandhiji and carry out his instructions as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom. They must remember that non-violence is the basis of this movement. A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress Committees can function. When this happens every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence of India.

"Lastly, while the AICC has stated its own view of the future governance under free India, the AICC wishes to make it quite clear to all concerned that by embarking on a mass struggle, it has no intention of gaining power for the Congress. The power, when it comes, will belong to the whole people of India."

So there it is. An obvious compromise between conflicting points of view, *but* with a repeated emphasis on non-violence, and a very obvious leaving of the door open for negotiation. There is no mention of "Quit India," there is no mention of do or die, and there is no demand that the British are to quit instantly. The British seized on the opportunity afforded by the resolution to sweep away the horde of Congress skirmishers that were disrupting their flanks and making concentration on the real war difficult. We carried out their orders.

## V

On 10 August the C.P. and Berar delegates left Bombay to return to their own states. All the former Congress ministers were in the group and we received orders to arrest the prominent leaders at Malkapur, which was in my subdivision. They were duly arrested at about 2 a.m. when the train arrived at Malkapur, and it was amusing to find that Pandit D.P. Mishra, former Home Minister of C.P., had foreseen the arrest. Presumably he knew how the police mind works; he had persuaded his colleagues, including the former Chief minister, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, to buy tickets only up to Malkapur, so that they did not waste any money! The Superintendent of Police was Cartwright, a humourless man who had voluntarily assumed the entire burden of the British Empire. He twitted his prisoners with having wasted their money in buying tickets to Nagpur, when their journey would end at Malkapur. In response Pandit Mishra held up a sheaf of tickets, all only up to Malkapur. Cartwright was shocked. He asked "Who told you that you were going to be arrested here?" Pandit Mishra replied laconically. "First railway station inside the Central Provinces."

That settled Cartwright for a time, but only temporarily. The prisoners were taken to Nagpur in special buses, and Cartwright resumed the attack *en route*. He said, in extremely poor taste, "What is all this nonsense about an open rebellion? Your rebellion is finished before it even started!" In spite of the fact that Pandit Shukla was a seasoned politician he indulged himself in the luxury of losing his temper, and said something like this, "If you had given us a couple of days more, you

would have known what an open rebellion is, you and your police stations!" It was an angry retort that meant nothing, but the British made good use of it in the Tottenham report (*Report on the Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances*, by Sir Richard Tottenham, then Home Secretary to the Government of India). Their version was that Pandit Shukla said, "If we had been given ten days time, every police station in the province would have been burnt down." The Congress version was something else again. "It is lucky for the British that the Congress is wedded to non-violence. If this had not been so, there would have been such a rebellion that every police station in the country would have been burnt down." Truth is the first casualty in polemics.

Curiously enough, the first cipher telegram containing a fairly full report on the disturbances, from the Home Department of the Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, gave the truth—unlike the Tottenham Report. It is dated 5 September 1942 and reads:

Our intelligence authorities do not at present see any master hand behind disturbances and attribute them largely to cumulative effect of anti-British agitation which has been deliberately intensified by congress leaders since failure of crippo mission and partly also to intervention of congress socialist party forward block and extreme revolutionary parties who are always ready to fish in troubled waters (*The Transfer of Power, 1942-47*, Vol. II, No. 697, p. 904).

Dr Parasnis, an old gentleman of nearly eighty, was a member of the AICC from Khamgaon. He was perfectly harmless, and was passing through a very difficult time. Both his sons were down with typhoid which, in those days before the advent of antibiotics, was a tricky disease. The indefatigable Cartwright appeared in Khamgaon with a warrant for his arrest under the Defence of India Rules. I had deliberately left the old gentleman out of my list, but Cartwright was the horrible type that always did his homework. There was only one thing to do. I rang up Jayaratnam, who was now the Chief Secretary, and explained the circumstances. I said that I would accept personal responsibility for Dr Parasnis if he was not

arrested. Jayaratnam said, "O.K., it's your neck. Put Cartwright on to me." The warrant was cancelled. Somewhat to my surprise, this trifling episode paid unexpected dividends. The public as well as the politicians recognized me as a human being. A couple of days later Ekbote, the President of the District Congress Committee, was to address a public meeting on the Congress resolution of the 7th August. He was an energetic and forceful man—incidentally my tennis partner—and ranked high on the list of those to be roped in. I decided to do the job at the meeting itself. I went alone, without any police escort, and this occasioned some surprise, but no one said anything. When Ekbote got up to speak, I served him with the warrant. He announced that he had been arrested and that the meeting would not now be held. The crowd, which was about twenty thousand strong, began to get restive. I whispered to him, "Could you possibly get the crowd to disperse before you come with me? If you don't, it looks as if I'll have to accompany you,—as a patient!" He could have created a very difficult situation by refusing my request. He did not. He went back to the microphone and asked the audience to disperse peacefully, saying that he would not go with me until they had done so. In a few minutes everything quietened down, the crowd dispersed, and I took Ekbote to his house, where I gave him a couple of hours to sort out his affairs before he went to jail.

I was fortunate in my Deputy Commissioner, S.W.G. Olpherts-Forrester. A tough man with a sense of humour, his subordinates could always rely on his support if they were in a tight corner. Once he realized that I could look after myself, he gave me a free hand in my subdivision, and that is how I came to discover Section 151 of the Criminal Procedure Code. This provision of law was invented for policemen, particularly the unscrupulous ones. It enables arrest on suspicion of being about to commit a cognizable offence. The accused is produced before a magistrate within twenty-four hours and remanded to jail custody. At each hearing the police claim that the investigation is incomplete and obtain another remand, and the process goes on until the magistrate loses patience and discharges the accused or until the police decide that enough is enough. We used Section 151 in those cases where we felt that

the Defence of India Rules would be a form of overkill, detaining the person until the opportunity for making trouble had passed, usually a week or two. Since I was the magistrate dealing with these cases, getting a remand was no problem. However, I did once have a narrow shave. A person arrested under Section 151 was remanded to the magisterial lockup—and everyone forgot about him, quite inexcusably. Two months later I received a notice from the High Court in a *habeas corpus* case. The applicant was the Forgotten Man. I immediately released him and fell over backwards apologizing to their Lordships—in that order. Somewhat to my surprise, the apology was accepted and the matter was closed. Justice Hemeon, who dealt with the case, later told me, "The matter was so serious that we had only two alternatives; to hang you or to accept your apology. You were not worth hanging."

Nothing happened in Khamgaon subdivision or in Buldana district. No wires cut, no lathi charge, and only five out of the twenty-two persons ordered to be arrested by the Government were in fact arrested. This created a peculiar problem. People started coming to me and demanding to be arrested. They knew perfectly well that when the Congress returned to power, their chances of a lucrative position depended on the answer to that fateful question—and what did *you* do during the Movement? I obliged them by bending the Defence of India Rules slightly. I can honestly—or dishonestly—claim credit for a number of the significant political promotions of later years.

The total number of dead (as a direct result of police action) in the Central Provinces and Berar was fifty. The district wise breakup is as follows: Nagpur seven, Wardha one, Chanda six, Bhandara five, Jabalpur two, Mandla one, Sagar one, Raipur one, Betul seven, Hoshangabad one, Bilaspur one, Durg one, Amravati sixteen, total fifty. And yet the figures are, in a sense, misleading. The casualties occurred in isolated incidents, one or two in the whole district. For instance, all the deaths in Amravati district took place at a village called Yaoli. No one really knows how the trouble started. One version is that a British officer tried to photograph some persons who had been arrested. The crowd took exception to this and snatched his camera, the police used their lathis, and there was a free-for-all in which the Deputy Commissioner had his leg broken.

Then the firing began at point-blank range, and fourteen people died. It is significant that no one died on the Government side.

When *my* grandchildren ask me what *I* did in the '42 movement I say—"I waited for it."

### III. FOOD

December 1942 and the winter of our discontent. The *juar* was good, the cotton was good, elsewhere in the province the paddy crop was good. And yet prices rose until we in our innocence thought they could rise no further. There was no shortage of foodgrains; there was a shortage of money with which to buy them. Wages did not keep pace with the sudden rise of prices. Labour, whether in the private sector or employed by the Government, was not as well organized as it is now. I had no power to fix prices, fortunately, or I would also have committed that folly. The merchants and the more socially conscious citizens got together, with a little prodding from me, and we opened what was to my knowledge the first fair price shop in the Province. The merchants agreed to sell on a no-profit, no-loss basis, and I sat with them once a week to determine the price. These shops did not enable us to hold the price line because they linked the selling price with the actual cost of grain, and the actual cost rose periodically. But they made the people feel that *someone* was sympathetic towards their hardships, even if he was a bloody fool. In those days sympathy was also a scarce commodity.

I have said that there was no shortage of foodgrains. This was true of Buldana district and particularly of my subdivision, both of which were surplus. Our shortage was of money. But elsewhere in the country there was a shortage of grain as well as money.

It was true in 1942, and it is true now, that the level of wages in Government employment sets the level in the private sector.

Wages in the private sector are either above or below the Government level for equivalent work, depending on the profitability of the sector concerned. But by and large, the private employer determines his wage in relation to the wage paid by the Government for approximately the same kind of work. The British resolutely held down wages. One reason was their liability to India for war services; they did not want the bill to be too large, and rising wages would certainly have inflated it. The other reason was a more brutal one. For several years preceding the war, India had been deficit in foodgrains and imports had been on a large scale. While our net exports during the five years 1915-16 to 1919-20 had been four hundred thousand tons, in the five years 1935-36 to 1939-40 our net imports were thirteen hundred thousand tons (*History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Dr Tara Chand, Vol.3, p.55). With the outbreak of war, imports ceased. There was a shortage of foreign exchange, and, even more important, every ton of shipping available was desperately needed for military purposes. In these circumstances the British probably felt that low wages would operate like rationing. With low—relative to the price index—wages and high food prices, people would be forced to buy less. The fact that in doing so they might starve to death was neither here nor there. You have to break eggs to make an omelette. There were no further imports. Instead, we had the Bengal famine.

We were told that there was no real shortage, the trouble was due to hoarding by the *bania*, the problem could easily be solved by a few marginal adjustments—the better-off should eat less cereals, the poor should substitute part of their cereal intake with non-cereal foods. I learnt economics under Lord Robbins, Caitskill and Hall and the most important thing they taught me was to take nothing on trust. I suggested delicately that the better-off in India were such a microscopic minority that what they did was of no importance whatsoever to the food front. Even if they ate no cereals at all, the total saving would hardly suffice to give the labouring classes a tenth of a *chapati* each. I also pointed out that hoarding is a symptom of scarcity and not the cause. It is only when things are not available that people hoard. Here there is no room for doubt as to which comes first, the chicken or the egg. As for the poor substituting

part of their cereal intake by non-cereals, they already had difficulty in finding the money for their minimum requirement of cereals, how on earth would they find the money for a more expensive substitute? (That is not true today. As I write, potatoes are a rupee a kilo and wheat is two rupees!) What I said was true and therefore unpopular with our British masters. Today it is still mostly true and still unpopular.

The transformation of India from a surplus to a deficit country deserves a closer look. First, the facts. If we compare four different periods of time between 1893 and 1946, we find that foodgrain production was steadily declining. In the period 1893 to 1896 (three years) food production was 70.9 million tons per annum. Between 1906 to 1916 (ten years) it averaged 74 million tons. In the ten years 1926 to 1936, it was 60.6 million tons. And in the ten years 1936 to 1946 it dropped marginally to 60.3 million tons. (Source—official statistics.) The decline is more striking if we put the figures in terms of per capita food production, thus bringing the population growth into focus. In the decade 1897 to 1906, food production per capita per annum was 560 lbs. This figure fell to 394 lbs. in the decade 1937 to 1946, by approximately 30 per cent. (Kuznets, Moore and Spengler, *Economic Growth: Brazil, India, Japan*.) This is in spite of the fact that the total cultivated area increased from 221 million acres in 1901 to 1905 to 258 million acres in the period 1940 to 1945, under food crops. The fall in per capita production is not entirely due to the growth in population. As the acreage increased, poorer and poorer lands were brought under the plough. Their per acre production was low and dragged down the average for the whole area under cultivation. But this does not explain why gross or total production declined, in spite of the cultivated area having increased. The explanation is that per acre yields of even non-marginal land came down. In the period 1900 to 1945, while the total cultivated area increased by 21 per cent, the total agricultural output rose by only 14 per cent. There was an actual fall in productivity by 7 per cent.

But enough of figures. The crux of the matter is that in British eyes Indian agriculture was incidental to the supply of the raw materials they needed; indigo, and later, cotton,

jute, and sugar. For such commercial crops the railways offered favourable freight rates, Britishers became planters and were very much on the right side of the Government, the technical know-how available was freely offered for such crops. For foodgrains or crops of no economic interest to the Raj—nothing. From 1921 to 1922 the United Kingdom was spending Rs 1380 per thousand acres for the development of agriculture—the Punjab was spending exactly fifty-six rupees. Times have not changed much. Today, agriculture accounts for 49.6 percent of the Gross National Product in our country. During the period of the Third Plan, only 32 percent of the expenditure on the *productive* sector (not total expenditure) was earmarked for it. Kipling said:

It's Tommy this and Tommy that, and chuck 'im out,  
the brute!  
But it's saviour of 'is country when the guns begin to  
shoot.

In our case it's *Jai Jawan Jai Kisan*... but only when a crisis is breathing down our necks. To this day we have not been able to decide the acreage the nation needs under each crop in each region, nor have we evolved a system of subsidies to bring those acreages into being. All the advanced countries have done so. During the last ten years of my service I tried to do two things for my state—crop insurance and planned crop acreages. The Crop Insurance Bill was passed by the Vidhan Sabha but lack of funds prevented its implementation. Planned crop acreages was a miscarriage. Unfortunately, nothing worthwhile produces votes.

Twenty-two years after I was S.D.O. Khamgaon, when I was the Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, I often wished that I could recapture the courage and ignorance of those days and marry it to the experience and knowledge I had since gained. The tragedy of age is that it knows too much, and knowledge breeds fear. I knew nothing and ignorance was bliss, so I did what I thought was right. Miraculously, I got away with it. Forrester was now the Deputy Commissioner of Nagpur, which was passing through difficult times, teetering on the knife-edge of food riots. He sent his most competent

—but also unfortunately his most dishonest—Extra Assistant Commissioner (now called Deputy Collector) to buy *juar* in Khamgaon. This gentleman carefully steered clear of me, but spent two days confabulating with the merchants, and suddenly prices rose by ten rupees per quintal. I sat up and took notice. The merchants were holding heavy stocks, it was the off-season and arrivals were slack. What the Nagpur buyer had done was to rig the market. His instructions were to buy at the prevailing price. He got the merchants to offer ten rupees per quintal more for the few bags that were coming in daily, so naturally the prevailing price became the old price plus ten rupees, giving a windfall benefit of the same amount to the traders in respect of their heavy old stocks. He then struck his deal; the Nagpur purchases would be at the new market price and the ten rupees unearned increment would be split fifty-fifty between him and the trade. I sent for the three leading merchants and showed them three detention orders made out in their names. I promised that the orders would be executed if the old price was not restored by 4 P.M. the next day. They beat the warrant of arrest by several hours and the *juar* price duly dropped by exactly ten rupees. But the officer from Nagpur wept on Forrester's shoulder, and Forrester took up the matter with Kamath, who was the Food Secretary, and Kamath took my hide off without benefit of anesthesia. But when I explained the facts and offered to buy Nagpur's requirements at ten rupees less than the price quoted by the official agent, he cooled down and took me at my word. I completed the transaction, and he must have been satisfied because he pulled me into the Food Department a few months later. I served under him for many years and in many different capacities and I owe him more than I can ever repay, in terms of kindness and support and teaching of my job.

The middle of 1943 came and with it my orders of transfer to Nagpur as Controller of Food Supplies for the district. The packing, except for the livestock, was no problem—we had little to pack. We even managed about the livestock; four bull terriers, two pups, a bear cub, a young panther, two horses and last but not least, a large rooster of indeterminate parentage, from which my nine-months old daughter refused

to be parted. I declined the invitations to farewell functions, but there was one gift from Khamgaon which I had to accept. There was a Mazdoor Sangh (Labour Union) which represented all types of manual labour. When I tried to pay for the handling and loading of my luggage, the head *hamal* said, with a small smile, "That is our farewell present to you, it is all we have to give. Remember us sometimes, as you remembered us when you were here." So perhaps my fair price shops did do some good after all.

## II

We owe the British a debt of gratitude for many things; for example, the Western style commode which enables one to read the morning newspaper at the earliest opportunity, and without interruption; and the British breakfast, which would have enabled us to conquer the world if only we had adopted it, and if Mahatmaji had allowed us. But they also taught us some things for which I find it difficult to forgive them. Distrust of the professional is a curious facet of the British character. They honestly believe—or believed—that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, which is an injustice to Wellington, a tough career soldier who learnt his job the hard way, fighting the Marathas. The British are an extremely individualistic race, which does not take kindly to controls that circumscribe the freedom of the individual. Combine these two characteristics, and add to them a third—the Indian dislike of anything new—and what happened in 1943 becomes understandable. There was an overall shortage of foodgrains and other essentials, prices had soared, wages had remained static, and there was acute distress amongst the people. If ever a situation called for the immediate introduction of integrated controls under the leadership of experts, this was it. The trouble was that there was just no time to build up production or expertise, we had to face the emergency *now*. To my mind, controls militate against production, but sometimes, and in the short run, there is no alternative to them. Instead the British proceeded to deal with the matter as if it was a file marked "Urgent," which actually means "take your own time." Fair price shops were opened in a few

places, the supplies for them being obtained through open market purchases. When prices rose, they were statutorily fixed—and stocks promptly disappeared. All of us were amateurs facing the professionals of the trade. The basic truth that no price control is possible without control of a major part of the total effective supply had not been learnt. The Raj groped blindly for a solution to the problem, confident of bungling through in the best British tradition.

As Controller of Food Supplies, I was a part of the district strength, which meant that my immediate superior was the Deputy Commissioner, Nagpur, now Forrester, under whom I had worked in Khamgaon. I reported to him on arrival and he explained my job in admirably few words. "Nagpur has had more than its fair share of shooting but I'm afraid it's in for some more—the poor devils! There is almost no grain, the crowds at the Fair Price shops are growing every day, and there's that horrible subdued hum in the air, which is always the prelude to serious trouble. Worst of all, there's really nothing that can be done at the district level. Now that you've come I'm going to leave the food side to you—naturally you can rely on me to the hilt for support and anything else I can give." For the next few days I carried out his orders—I tightened a nut here and a bolt there, I improved efficiency, most important of all, I got to know the problem. But I was very far from solving it. Forrester was right; the solution was not in the hands of the district authorities. I plucked up enough courage to go to Kamath, the Secretary of the Food Department, and tell him the truth as I saw it. The Fair Price shop system was far from being a cure, it was not even a palliative. All that it had achieved was the creation of a new breed of professional purchasers who bought and sold and bought again, forcing the genuine consumer to rely on his services because he had made it impossible for a normal man to get through the queues. It undermined public confidence because no one was sure that there would be anything left to buy if and when he reached the head of the line. The answer was a ration card system but that would require assured supplies, even if only to the extent of availability and not of need. What I said was the irritating kind of thing which people without responsibility for the really difficult part of a job say, so glibly. Assured

supply was the crux of the problem—and that I was generously leaving in his lap. Somewhat to my surprise, he was not annoyed; as I would have been in his place. He said that more or less the same thoughts had occurred to him and he had been trying to work out a method by which the Government could procure, at a fixed price, the requirements of at least the major urban areas. That, incidentally, was the birth of monopoly procurement.

This is as good a place as any to have a look at one of the shibboleth of food administration. The most important is that rural areas can look after themselves, because, after all, it is they who produce the grain; while the urban areas cannot. There must be something wrong somewhere. During the Bengal famine, I never heard of any urban dweller dying of starvation. On the other hand, literally millions of starving villagers poured into Calcutta and any other town they could reach, in the pathetic hope that somehow, somewhere in the city, they would find food. Some did, but all that the majority found was death. The same thing happens, on a smaller scale, whenever there is a crop failure, and it passes unnoticed because no one dies. The facts may be unpalatable but they should be faced. Eighty-five percent of the population of India lives in villages. The great majority of these people do not produce enough to feed themselves; they have not got enough land. In Madhya Pradesh studies have been conducted by various authorities and at various times to find out the size of a viable holding. The results are surprisingly unanimous—7.5 acres. (A viable holding is one that can keep its owner and his family at a level just—but only just—above the margin of subsistence.) 66.5 percent of the holdings in Madhya Pradesh are held by people with *less* than 7.5 acres. On a rule of thumb basis, 66.5 percent of the rural population must therefore be deficit. In fact the percentage is much larger because it is notorious that the poorer the cultivator, the larger the family he has.

It is quite true that the townsman does not produce grain at all. But the laws of economics bring to him the lion's share of whatever is available during a famine, precisely because he has the money to pay for it. At such a time, even the surplus cultivator will not sell grain in his village, partly because the

villagers cannot afford to pay him what he will get in the town, and largely because of the danger of looting. Have you ever seen a town dweller selling his children during a famine? No, neither have I.

There are three perfectly valid reasons why the urban areas have to be looked after. The first is that they give far more trouble than the villages. Crowds gather more easily, get excited more easily, riot more easily, and if there is firing, cause a judicial enquiry more easily. The second is that newspapers give far more publicity to them. Failure to supply extra sugar in a metropolis during Diwali will get banner headlines, while a few famine deaths in a village will make the lower half of the third column on the back page with difficulty. Governments are sensitive to publicity. Thirdly, if urban areas are not fed (and cordoned off) during periods of shortage their superior buying power will draw away much needed grain from the rural areas. But the order of importance of these reasons is the order in which they have been stated.

I returned from Kamath, relieved at having got my troubles off my chest. After that, events moved fast. He worked out his scheme, he set up a machinery to implement it, and ten days later I got a summons from him. He asked how long I would require to introduce a ration card system in Nagpur. I had already thought out most of the details and I said, brashly, that I would need fifteen days. He was surprised but did not comment. He merely told me that in less than fifteen days I would have adequate stocks for three months and I should go ahead, and that was that. As soon as I left him, I realized what I had let myself in for. Nagpur in those days had a population of three hundred thousand, and in order to introduce rationing we would have to enumerate every household, print three to four hundred thousand ration cards, fill them up, open the requisite number of shops, and distribute the cards to them. There were other problems too, which still give me a bad time in nightmares.

To cut a long story short, we completed the job in ten days. The public gave me enormous quantities of free labour, quite voluntarily, and the Municipal Committee rendered yeoman service. We were under Governor's rule, and the adviser in charge of food was Sir Geoffrey Burton. He indicated that after

a few days he would like to go round and have a look at the ration shops. I asked the Boss—as we called Kamath behind his back—whether he would like to go too, and he said something which I have never forgotten, “Why? If you’re satisfied, I see no reason to have a look myself.” It is trust and confidence of this kind which evokes the best in a subordinate. Sir Geoffry went round in due course and I accompanied him. I presume he was satisfied as I escaped without a rocket. Later on the Governor, Sir Henry Twynam, also inspected the ration shops, more as an exercise in publicity than anything else.

I settled down to the life of a shopkeeper. There were 210 ration shops to be watched—I use the word advisedly, if you did not watch them like a hawk, they immediately swindled the Government as well as the public, with a fine impartiality—there were godowns holding about thirty thousand tons to be managed, large movements of grain had to be arranged at short notice, and the trade had to be kept in its proper place, which was as far from the rationing setup as possible. But the real trouble was the customer, not the poor or even the middle class consumer because they, poor devils, were satisfied with very little. It was the VIP and the top ten type that gave me grey hairs. Any shopkeeper who honestly believes the customer is always right should have his head examined. The wife of a very senior I.C.S. officer was short-changed, quite inadvertently, by one of our Government-owned ration shops. The amount involved was less than two rupees and we made it good before her first scream of outrage had hit the sky, but nothing less than the dismissal of the unfortunate teenage shop assistant would satisfy her. I wrote out the order of dismissal at once, showed it to her, and, as soon as I had removed myself from her presence, tore it up. I did, however, transfer the boy to a city shop where she would never go.

I have never met a woman who could tell the difference between Badshah Bhog and Chinoor (both varieties of fine rice), but let them into a shop and they become experts—experts on rice, wheat, cloth, everything in the shop. This makes them easy to cheat, but the Boss had strictly forbidden cheating, even as a form of punishment. My wife is a typical woman and she cannot understand why I am unsympathetic when she is cheated. She will, if she reads this book.

We had a much more serious problem than customers, or even women. Nagpur was securely in the grip of two major gangs, each bitterly hostile to the other. A number of murders had taken place, the victims being members of one gang of the other, and, sometimes, an unoffending bystander who happened to get in the way. On one occasion I was awaiting my turn to give evidence before the City Magistrate in a food case when a rather agitated individual appeared before him and demanded that his evidence be recorded immediately because he was certain that he would be murdered within the next hour. He was a key prosecution witness in a murder case against the members of one of the gangs. City Magistrates are overworked and short-tempered people; he was told where to get off, in no uncertain terms. Soon afterwards I found that my evidence was not to be recorded on that particular day, and I went out of the court. The City Magistrate's court was on the second floor of the District Office building, and as I climbed down the stairs I saw the man who had claimed to be in fear of imminent death, walking in front of me. Recognition had hardly registered, when another man overtook me, stabbed him expertly between the shoulders, and disappeared down the rest of the stairs in flying leaps. I hardly saw him, I could certainly not recognize him again. We tried to help the wounded man but he died before we could even lift him from the tangled heap into which he had fallen.

One of these gangs was led by a man called—for the purposes of this book—Dhanraj Patel. His speciality was extortion from shopkeepers, the old Chicago protection racket. If the shopkeeper paid the amount that was fixed as his monthly insurance premium—well and good. If he did not, something unpleasant invariably happened to him and/or to his shop. When rationing started, my shops were approached for the usual protection money. They were working on a slender margin of profit and could not afford to pay. Very reluctantly, some of the shopkeepers disclosed their predicament to me in the strictest confidence. I came to the conclusion that there was much sense in the Hindi proverb. "It takes a thorn to remove a thorn" and tried to apply it. Under the guise of recruiting godown *choukidars* (watchmen) I recruited forty of the toughest *goondas* I could find in Nagpur, and kept a truck standing by, twenty-four hours a day, to immediately take them wherever they were

needed. This was after the gang had permanently blinded a young ration shopkeeper by throwing acid at his face. The police had their hands tied by the law, and by the quite handsome payments so regularly made to each police station in Dhanraj's domain.

The next time his men tried to make life unpleasant for one of my shopkeepers, my men reached the spot and there was a brief but effective free-for-all, which ended in three of his people being hospitalized for long periods. After this episode had been repeated four or five times, the demands on my shopkeepers ceased. Instead, I received a courteous message from Dhanraj, through devious channels. It said that I was young and, in normal circumstances, there was no reason why I should not live a long and healthy life. The emphasis was on "normal." I sent a reply through the same channels to the effect that if he would kindly leave my shopkeepers alone, everyone's prospects of living a long and healthy life would improve. During my boxing career I always hated dancing around the ring and trying to be clever. The attacks on my shopkeepers ceased and I thought the matter had ended. I was wrong.

That was my first mistake. I made another, and more serious one. Originally the ration shops had kept office hours, functioning at a time when most people could not go to them. I changed the time to early morning and late evening, approximately the same hours as those of the ordinary shops. But this created a problem in regard to the Government-owned ration shops. By the time they closed, the Treasury was also closed and they were left with the day's takings, a total of sixty or seventy thousand rupees, to keep until the next morning. The obvious solution was to deposit the money at the nearest Police Station, but the Nagpur Police Stations had no imbedded safes, and the rules require that Government money must be kept in such safes. Orders were issued to have them installed. In the meantime, with incredible stupidity, I directed that the sealed cash boxes should be brought to my house every night and left there. Fortunately, the safes were installed in a very few days and the cash boxes ceased to come to my house, but by that time the whole of the Nagpur underworld knew that I was keeping huge sums of money overnight.

We had only one child at the time, a self-opinionated young

ady of nine months, who insisted on having her first feed at precisely 5 a.m. The milk used to be kept in the dressing room adjoining our bedroom, and it was my duty to heat it for her. An itinerent cat had got at the milk before my daughter on several occasions, so I acquired the habit of sleeping with a cane under my bed. On this particular night, some days after the message from Dhanraj, we had dined out, returning at about eleven. At 2 a.m. I awoke for no apparent reason. I am normally a very sound sleeper, but long practice at sleeping over tiger kills has conditioned me to awake at any stealthy movement. I put two and two together and came up with five—it was that damned cat again. I picked up the cane and walked as silently as I could to the dressing room.

There were two of Dhanraj's men in the dressing room. Their orders, as I subsequently discovered, were to get the cash boxes first, and then to teach me how unwise it was to get involved in his affairs. There were no cash boxes so they had come looking for me. I was a sitting duck in the bedroom, but my wife was there and would certainly intervene, and the Maratha hoodlum has a positive phobia about using violence on a woman. That was why they had gone to the dressing room and deliberately made a slight noise to get me there. The man behind the door lashed out with a loaded stick, instinctively I ducked and escaped with a glancing blow on my thick head, which merely brought me to my knees instead of putting me out for the count. My wife's wardrobe, doors ajar, was just in front of me. I dived for it, hoping that she had again ignored my repeated entreaties to keep her loaded revolver, safely under lock and key. She had, it was under a pile of saris. I snatched it up and fired at the man who had hit me. A clean miss at eighteen inches, but it put them off. Both men rushed through the outside door of the dressing room, which they had thoughtfully opened in advance, into the compound. I fired again, at the sound. There was a high pitched, gurgling cry, the sound an animal makes when shot through the lungs. Then silence. An indignant voice broke in on me. "What are you making all that noise for?" It was my wife, complete with baby in her arms, which proves my theory that a woman thinks of her child first, her husband next, and thereafter has no room in her head for thought. I said a few carefully chosen

words and pulled her into the bedroom, where she would be safe from flying sticks or worse.

The police investigated vigorously. Not only did they prize the mirror of my wife's dressing-set from its enamel frame (Presumably looking for finger prints), but they read all the love letters I had written to her when we were engaged (improving their minds). In spite of all this, no trace of the culprits could be found, and the crime was written off with a final report. But I had 210 ration shops and a man with these at his disposal is in command of the finest intelligence setup in the world. People *have* to go to ration shops, they *have* to wait there, and they *have* to talk while they wait. All that is needed is to direct their talk into constructive channels. My shopkeepers did the directing and came up with a full story. Dhanraj had used a car belonging to an eminent trader—I shall have something to say about his ability to get cars later on in this chapter—and the man I had wounded was taken to Amravati, where he died. When I heard this I was worried. I had no intention of getting involved in a gang feud, and it looked as if this was exactly what I had done. It seemed to me that the only way to tackle the situation was to take the bull by the horns. I sent a message to Dhanraj, asking for an appointment and assuring him that I would abide by any conditions he might lay down. He gave me the appointment and, in due course, we met. I will not go into detail, but we arrived at a *modus vivendi*. My main argument was that if he did not leave me and my work alone, I would continue to make life so difficult for him that he would be compelled to liquidate me. And if he did so, the fat would be in the fire. The bumping off of an I.C.S. officer was not something the Raj would take in its stride, there would be repercussions of the most violent nature, and even the local police would be powerless to protect him. There was no possible doubt about his ability to get rid of me—but would the price be worth paying? He was a tall man of indeterminate age, immensely imposing, clean shaven and bald headed, with the hooded eyes of a vulture. He looked at me. "Do you mean that you are *willing* to die?" I said irritably, "I don't *want* to do anything of the sort—I have a wife and a baby daughter, and I am young. But what choice do you leave me?"

He nodded slowly. "No, you are not the kind of man who would tell his shopkeepers to look after themselves." Suddenly he stood up, and pushed out his hand. "All right—I agree." We shook hands on the bargain, and he never broke his word.

By now Kamath had organized the Food Department into a machine that really clicked. There was a procurement and storage side, there was a distribution side, and there was an accounts side, headed by an officer from the audit and accounts, with the rank of accountant general. He picked the best from every field, from the I.C.S., from the education department, from the revenue branch, from agriculture, from everywhere, all men who made their mark in later life, with the exception, that is, of me. And even I ended up with the distinction of being the only I.C.S. officer who shot more than a hundred tigers off the ground—the blasted butcher! In a word, Kamath introduced professionalism into food, and to hell with the playing fields of Eton, or Loyola Collège, or whatever; we were not being paid to play. Like true professionals, we were pragmatic. Rice procurement was based on monopoly purchase—sales of quantities beyond a certain limit could only be made to the Government—because the rice mills offered a convenient bottleneck where we could grab the stuff as soon as it was milled. But in the case of *juar* and wheat the surpluses were marginal and monopoly purchase was easily evaded by selling direct to the consumer or the retailer. We scrapped monopoly purchase in respect of these two grains, and went in for a producer's levy on a sliding scale, under which the cultivator had to give us a certain quantity per acre, rising, in the case of the bigger cultivator, to one-third of his gross produce. It worked.

I remained in the Food Department throughout the rest of the war, during the first years of independence, and until January 1949 as Controller of Food Supplies, as Deputy Secretary and Deputy Director, Distribution, and finally when Kamath became Commissioner Berar, as Secretary and Director of Food. By 1949 the food situation had eased considerably, a measure of decontrol had been introduced, and I felt that it was time for me to renew my acquaintance with the districts and the villages where India still lives. I took my courage in both hands and went straight to the Chief Minister,

Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, and asked for a district. He saw my point that I was getting stale in food, but not the need for me to go to Bastar, a remote and tribal district. "Why Bastar?" he asked. I explained that I had always been interested in the tribals, that there was much to be done in Bastar, and, almost as an afterthought, "And of course, there's the *shikar* . . ." He laughed uproariously, "And of course, there's the *shikar*! You should have put that at the beginning. There's *shikar* in Nagpur too, you'd better take that." Nagpur was, for all practical purposes, just another secretariat job. I gave a non-committal reply and eased myself out of his presence—he did not take kindly to too much contradiction. But I asked Pandit D.P. Mishra to put in a word about Bastar, and as he always had a kind spot for me—he did. That was how, in the end, I got Bastar.

Two years later I came to Nagpur for a conference, as Deputy Commissioner Bastar. I needed transport but all my friends were either out of station, or themselves fully occupied, and I drew one blank after another. Then I thought of Dhanraj Patel and rang up the unlisted number he had given me. He listened to my request and asked where I was ringing from. I said, "The railway station."

"Please remain near the booking office. After fifteen minutes a car will arrive and my man will find you. The car and driver will be at your disposal as long as you are in Nagpur." I thanked him and rang off. Exactly fifteen minutes later the car arrived, complete with driver, and I really enjoyed using it for the two days of my stay. It was the official car of a minister.

### III

Can there be an epilogue to a chapter? I don't see why not. Anyway, here it is, quite frankly an exercise in one-up-manship. In 1950 the Government of India appointed a Committee to go into the question of procurement of foodgrains and allied problems. The Chairman was Thirumala Rao, a senior member of Parliament, and the members were all officials—C.P.K. Menon, then Director General of Food Supplies of the Government of India, E.N. Mangat Rai I.C.S., and myself.

We submitted our report in six months, which must be some sort of a record for Committees, and my contribution was a minute of dissent. I reproduce it here for two reasons, firstly because I still hold exactly the same views now as I did then; and secondly, because it was the minute of dissent that was acted upon by the Government of India and the then Food Minister, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai.

"The members of the Foodgrains Procurement Committee were appointed in their individual capacities and not as representatives of their Governments. This minute of dissent, therefore, represents purely personal views.

"(2) The main term of reference of the Committee was 'to recommend such changes as may be necessary in the existing system of procurement and distribution to minimize imports in the case of a deficit State and to maximize exports in the case of a surplus State, and to reduce the difference between the prices in the market and the prescribed control prices.' The emphasis is placed on devising methods to improve procurement and distribution so as to solve the supply problem, the accent on prices being secondary.

"(3) The food problem contains two principal factors, each unfortunately opposed to the other, namely the supply factor and the price factor; there must be sufficient food to meet the minimum requirements of the people and it must be available at prices within their means. If the price factor did not exist, the supply factor would present no difficulties, for, in the last analysis, a sufficiently high price would, by eliminating the demand of the poorer sections of the population, make *any* supply adequate. But such a solution involves famine and starvation, and is obviously unthinkable.

"(4) Essentially, therefore, we have to arrive at a compromise solution, and in order to do so it is necessary to decide whether the supply aspect is to be given predominance or the price aspect. I have already indicated my own interpretation of our terms of reference; and I believe that this interpretation is also in accordance with the logic of facts. Controlled prices are not based on the cost of production; they are arbitrary in every sense of the word. There is, for example, no relation between a wheat price of Rs 13 for Punjab and 16 for adjoining surplus tracts of U.P. There can be nothing sacro-

sanct about such prices and any attempt to give them predominance in our solution must lead to an ultimate widening of the gap between demand and supply. The only effective way to make the controlled price the ruling price in a situation of shortage is to ensure that there are no transactions other than controlled transactions. This means the procurement of the entire surplus and universal rationing. Universal rationing is perfectly feasible if one ignores the cost but the procurement of the entire surplus is not. Stocks go underground; a black market flourishes; in the last analysis the cultivator simply eats more and no system yet devised can prevent him. What the procurement price is does not much matter so long as there is an alternative market at a higher price, whose very existence automatically makes the controlled rate inequitable. A State with an extremely efficient administrative machinery like Madras has tried such a system and the results speak for themselves. As against 65 per cent of rice production normally marketed, the Government succeeded in procuring only 32.5 per cent. The figures for millets are worse—5.6 per cent procurement against 18.5 percent normally marketed. On the other hand, they have had to statutorily ration 35 millions out of a population of 54 millions.

“(5) If we agree—and I do not see how we cannot agree, in view of the declaration that there will be no imports after 1951—that the supply aspect of the problem is the more important, certain conclusions follow:

(i) Our objective should be to reduce distribution commitments to a point where—(a) the gap between procurement and distribution will be minimised in deficit areas, and (b) a sufficient proportion of the total effective demand will be met at controlled prices to act as a brake on the rise of prices in the open or free market so that the general level of food prices is not unduly above the controlled rates. In other words, we must attempt to find an optimum point at which net availabilities (for consumption within the State in the case of deficit areas and for export in the case of surplus areas) are maximised, compatible with a reasonable level of prices, taking the controlled rate as the norm but without insisting on it as a universal price.

(ii) On the procurement side, this involves the recognition that intensification beyond a certain stage yields diminishing returns, in that it leads to a disproportionate increase of distribution commitments without a corresponding increase in procurement.

(iii) There can be no uniformity of systems because the optimum point we have mentioned in item 1 will be at different stages in different areas and an intensive system that works satisfactorily in a deficit area will be a failure in a surplus area as it will produce the diminishing returns alluded to above. The introduction of the Madras system of intensive procurement in U.P. would mean a 50 per cent increase in distribution commitments and only a 25 per cent increase in procurement. While, theoretically, the entire surplus can be taken from a producer, in practice it cannot; and the proportion it is possible to take in a surplus area is less than in a deficit one.

“(6) The ideal system of procurement and distribution for each area, would, in the light of the foregoing, be one that set out deliberately to take only a part of the surplus from the surplus producer and to feed only a part of the deficit population leaving the balance of production to be marketed freely. This system would maximize availabilities because arrivals in a free market are always more than under controls. It would maximize production because the higher price obtained by the producer for that part of his produce which is sold at uncontrolled rates would induce him to grow more. It would keep the general level of prices from soaring without restraint by meeting a part of the demand at the controlled rate.

“(7) The details of the system would vary from State to State according to the circumstances of each, as also the exact proportion it is desired to take from the producer. Basically it would be a partial levy, either on the producer or, where marketing is well organized, on the trader with export restrictions on the State and the proviso that quantities additional to the levy demand could be voluntarily sold to Government.

“(8) If the principles on which such a scheme is based are considered, it will be seen that it will have to vary from intensive procurement at one extreme to almost complete decontrol

at the other, because it is aimed at meeting conditions which differ widely. For example, in Malabar, no scheme which is not intensive from both procurement and distribution points of view can have any significant effect on prices because the deficit is so huge. The bigger the deficit, the more extreme are the measures needed to bring out local or individual surpluses at reasonable prices. When a surplus is big, particularly when it is concentrated into a small area, no particular rigor is needed to acquire it—it flows out of its own accord. But where—as in Malabar or Cochin-Travancore—it is surrounded by avid markets, it cannot be secured except by strict measures. Furthermore, imports have to be equitably distributed, particularly when they constitute such a large proportion of consumption requirements as in Malabar, or else they have very little effect on prices, unless the market can be saturated. We cannot find enough stocks for saturation; universal rationing, therefore, becomes a necessity. It is not possible without universal procurement, because local stocks are also required to fulfil the commitment. In certain deficit areas, however, relaxation almost to the point of decontrol would be the logical result. In the North Zone of Bihar, the general standard of wealth is high because profitable cash crops are grown. Its supply requirements are largely met by Nepal paddy. In such an area, local procurement is inadvisable because it would yield no results and would increase commitments. The area could safely be cordoned off and left to look after itself with the exception of certain essential classes of the population who would be fed from imports.

In all self-sufficient and surplus areas where a fairly efficient land records system is functioning the system would work in its entirety.

These variations from area to area are open to objection on the ground that they are breach of the principle of equality of sacrifice. The answer is that no such principle has ever been or possibly can be enforced. Even in a State like Madras, the producer is allowed to eat 1 lb. per day (he actually eats much more) while the ration for others is 12 ozs. I think it is time we got away from high sounding principles which exist only on paper and tried to find solutions that were practical and would actually work.

“(9) Another objection, raised by the Committee in Chapter two to any scheme which visualises two prices operating simultaneously an open market price and a controlled price—is that the open market price being much higher, the cultivator resents having to surrender part of his produce at a lower price and hence procurement fails. This objection is not really based on fact. There is always an open market or black market price which is higher than the controlled price even under such an intensive procurement scheme as in Madras. The cultivator’s resentment only becomes dangerous when an unreasonably large part of his surplus is taken; the taking of a small part of the surplus is viewed as a tax and does not create much opposition. And, obviously, there is likely to be more opposition to the taking of the whole surplus at a low price than to the taking of only a part of it. In every case where a partial levy has failed, the cause has been elsewhere than in the existence of an open market price. In U.P. it was due to demanding grains which were not produced in the holding and in Bihar it was due to engineered agitation which would have been much worse if a larger proportion of the produce had been taken.

“(10) The Committee have, however, adopted the view that the price factor is more important than the supply factor and their recommendations follow quite correctly and logically from this stand. Obviously if the price factor is to be given predominance, the best scheme would be one that would obtain control of the largest part of production. The Committee recognize that different local conditions necessitate modifications in some State but essentially their solution is an intensive monopoly with extensive rationing. In certain areas the intensity of the monopoly is to be less (as in Orissa) because of particular circumstances prevailing there, while in other areas it is to extend to what I may call absolute procurement and distribution, as in Madras.

“(11) As a result of this major decision on principle, the Committee’s recommendations have the effect of immediately increasing the assistance required by deficit or slightly surplus States from imports. U.P. is recommended a quota of 3.6 lakh tons; the proposed modifications in Bihar will need at least 1 lakh tons more imports; Hyderabad will require another 1 to

1½ lakh tons; and Mysore, Cochin-Travancore, West Bengal and Madras will all need greater imports. In surplus areas the immediate result will be a fall in availabilities for export particularly in Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat and Orissa.

There is of course the hope that in the long run, the policy of intensifying procurement and distribution will pay dividends, but these results cannot be expected in less than two years, and I do not believe that they will materialise at all.

“(12) The Committee have taken a line which involves intensification of controls even beyond the point where, in my view, diminishing returns set in. Such intensification, if only for the reason that it takes time to achieve, is not practicable unless a firm decision is taken that controls will continue over a period of years. Any radical change in food policy requires at least three years for a reasonable appraisal of its results to be made. I am not aware that the Government of India have committed themselves to three more years of controls and in fact the last Food Minister stated in Parliament that gradual decontrol was aimed at. Tightening up of procurement and distribution is surely a peculiar method of arriving at this end.

“(13) I have already mentioned that intensification of controls beyond an optimum stage yields diminishing returns. I would like to elucidate this point further. In the first place, not even the most intensive procurement system can procure the same proportion of production as was normally marketed. This fact is substantiated by the figures already quoted for Madras, and is due to psychological conditions created by the very existence of controls. The more the procurement scheme is tightened up the smaller are the increased gains from intensification. In the second place, intensification of controls means extension of rationing. The extension of rationing increases commitments in three ways:

- (a) in the absolute sense of having to feed more people,
- (b) in having to feed some people who would normally have been content with a high proportion of non-controlled grains in their diet, with controlled grains, and
- (c) in having to feed some people, who would normally have fed themselves, on unprocurable surpluses.

I need not expand items (a) and (b) which are self-evident but (c) needs a little explanation. A fairly significant part of any town's requirements of grain are met by deficit producers who market their stocks in the town, feeding themselves on cheaper foods. No procurement system can justifiably touch these inadequate producers who are therefore left free to patronise the black-market. In normal times, a petty *Kissan* who grows a little rice or wheat invariably sells it and lives on coarser grains and (in some parts of the country) on tubers, etc. As soon as a town is rationed, these supplies are cordoned out and just disappear. I have repeatedly come across such instances in my own experience.

“(14) Intensification of controls, in all areas, but particularly in self-sufficient or surplus areas, leads to a progressive stiffening of opposition. It is all very well to say that politics should be kept aloof from food, but in a democracy politics cannot be kept aloof from any subject that affects the interests of the people. If the people oppose a particular course of action that course must ultimately fail. I feel that the Committee have not been realistic enough in appraising the true importance of this factor. Democracy is essentially Government by consent and consent to stringent measures can only be obtained in times of stress and for temporary periods; it can never be obtained indefinitely. There remains the alternative of coercion, but even coercion fails, like the sulfanilamides, if used repeatedly.

“(15) The importance given by the Committee to the price factor involves, as we have seen, intensification of controls. This in turn means (a) greater expenditure in personnel and money for staff and (b) greater expenditure on foreign imports. No States can view with equanimity a position in which a substantial proportion of its seasoned officials are kept indefinitely on food work to the detriment of nation building activities. Almost every State in India is today suffering from an acute shortage of experienced officials, and intensification of controls will tend to perpetuate this position. As regards foreign imports, the subsidies paid on them come ultimately from the pockets of the tax-payer and any reduction of price which is attained by such means is deceptive and must in the long run prove ruinous.

“(16) There is one more and not the least important reason why I am unable to agree with recommendations which seek to intensify controls. In every area where this experiment has been tried, with the possible exception of Bombay, acreages under controlled cereals, except rice, have gone down alarmingly, particularly under millets. I agree that this decrease is probably due to substitution by other crops but, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it appears to me that such substitution has taken place because controls were too intense. In Bombay this tendency is not noticeable probably owing to the fact that the acreage was regulated until this year by law, and that the levy system in force arbitrarily assumes a certain proportion of the area to be under food.

Statistics for four major areas where controls were rigid and strict are reproduced below:

(‘000 acres)

State	Peak acreage and year (between 1939-40 and 1948-49)			1948-49 acreage and year		
	Rice	Wheat	Millets	Rice	Wheat	Millets
Madras	11014 1944-45	—	Juar 5052 1939-40	10280	—	Juar 4334
Mysore	844 1944-45	—	Ragi 2218 1943-44 Juar 864 1942-43	767	—	Ragi 1916  Juar 333
Madhya Pradesh	6304 1948-49	3229 1940-41	Juar 5648 1943-44	6304	1853	Juar 4962
Hyderabad	1419 1945-46	1125 1941-42	Juar 9605 1942-43	1032	263	Juar 5935

The steadiness of rice acreages is due to the fact that in most areas this crop is not substitutable. On the other hand, in areas where there has been a certain laxity of controls acreages have risen appreciably as will be seen from the chapter on U.P. Unless controls are imposed on all agricultural produce, diversion of acreages wherever possible to non-food crops or at least to non-controlled food crops is certain. The

extent of such diversion has already more than neutralised whatever benefits the Grow More Food Scheme may have produced up till now.

“(17) My difference of opinion with the Committee is on the basic principles I have already described. This difference naturally involves differences in regard to the recommendations for individual States. To treat each State at length would mean writing a separate report with even less hope of its being generally read than this minute of dissent, and I shall therefore confine myself briefly to indicating the salient points with which I do not agree in each Chapter.”

## IV. EXODUS

When is a part greater than the whole? When it belongs to the I.C.S. I make no apology for the drum-beating in this chapter. Neither apology nor justification is called for. All that I am about to say falls far short of what I would have said if I had not had the honour to belong to the Service.

At the end of 1939 the total strength of the I.C.S. in India was 1299, out of whom 759 were British and the rest Indian. The corresponding figures for the Central Provinces were 72 and 37. A handful of officers were recruited in 1940, 1941 and 1943 but the number is so small as to make no difference to the overall picture. There was no recruitment thereafter until the end of the war. The figures of 1939 may therefore be taken, for all practical purposes, as representing the situation that prevailed on the eve of Independence in August 1947.

The British officers did not merely add up to more than half of the cadre; they were the senior part, holding the key posts. And all of them, with less than half a dozen exceptions, belatedly obeyed Mahatmaji on 16 August 1947; they quit India. Try suddenly cutting the strength of any office—government or private—by more than half, and that half the senior half, and see what happens. Chaos is what will occur. But it did not occur when the I.C.S. (and the I.P.) were cut in less than half. Now re-read the first two sentences of this chapter and you will understand them. Overnight, we lost more than half our strength. Overnight, the responsibility for running the administration was dumped on what remained of the cadre, the Indian part, the junior part. It is for the country to judge

whether we measured up to the responsibility that was cast on us. I for one am confident of the verdict. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was in a position to know, paid us the ultimate tribute. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Others, particularly the politicians who were not in positions of power during those critical years, have been less than fair. To them we were neither Indian nor civil nor a service. Well, they have a right to their opinion. But it could justly be said of the I.C.S. and of the I.P.

Whom God abandoned, they defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay.

Remember India at the time of the post-partition riots? What were we like in our last days, we of the I.C.S.? We did not bestride the world like a colossus—our legs were too short. Nor were we the steel frame of the administration. What Lloyd George actually said in 1922 was "I can see no period when they (Indians) can dispense with the guidance and assistance of the small numbers of the British Civil Service. They are the steel frame of the whole structure." (*Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, Vol. 157, col. 1513.*) The steel frame was British. What he thought of us, the Indian members, is in the first sentence. And yet we have been beaten with this particular stick ever since I can remember.

The Service as a whole—British *and* Indian—consisted of quite ordinary men, set apart from others by three things; a dedicated sense of duty born of tradition and training; an independent outlook; and complete identification with the interests of the people of wherever we were sent to serve. We deteriorated later. But that is how we were in 1947. Parmanand, living on borrowed time, and sent to a light district to ease his last days, hastened his end by producing a superb addition to his own "Settlement Operations." One never heard the phrase "He can't do very much, he's ill you know." If an I.C.S. officer was ill, he was in hospital and on leave, not dragging out his illness on Government time. If he was on duty, then he was *doing* his duty, not talking about it.

Independence of outlook is a nuisance to any government,

and particularly to a politically motivated government. The British took it in their stride; they overruled the offender in the teeth of his protests. Later governments were not so charitable. Lacking the courage to overrule, they sometimes penalized. It made no difference. The I.C.S. continued to be independent. S.N. Mehta in Sagar refused to collect the land revenue because the crops had failed. He got a rocket; he still refused. In the end the Commissioner had to see for himself and he agreed with Mehta. That was that. I refuse to give any examples from my own career—my friends insist that in my case it is only bloody mindedness and not independence of outlook.

Identification with *our* people—that is how we always thought of our districts, *our* districts, *our* people—was complete. We fought tooth and nail for their interests and it did not matter in the least if our own suffered in the process. The only censure I received in my official life was contained in a letter communicating the Government's displeasure (richly deserved) for a most intemperate letter I had written, accusing them of bad faith with the people of Bastar, which was then my district. But I got what I wanted. And there is the story—probably apocryphal—of the Deputy Commissioner who replied to orders imposing a collective fine, with which he violently disagreed, "Your letter of the—instant, which is before me, will shortly be behind me in another capacity. I am, Sir, your most obedient servant."

So much for the official side. But what were we like as people? Very ordinary, I think. Neither plaster saints nor complete blackguards, although some of us did try. There was the very senior officer who was living quite openly with someone else's wife. When not so gently reproached, his reply was "At my age it's too much damn trouble going all the way to her place whenever I want to hold hands." Others specialized in more innocuous things. Rajan, until he died (in harness) was a corresponding member of the British and French Societies of Mathematicians, or whatever they call themselves, and an eminent mathematician in his own right. We had butterfly collectors, physicists, and poets too. In his own circle the I.C.S. man was extremely human, although to the world at large he presented a formidable mask of cold indifference.

Even the Boss (H.S. Kamath) of whom I have spoken earlier, unbent on occasion. I once took a week's casual leave and spent it in Betul chasing a tiger. While wandering in the jungles I was amazed at the catholicity of the aboriginal's diet and when I returned I wrote a note about it which was put up to him. His comment was "Very interesting" and then a P.S., "I hope the Deputy Secretary got his tiger!"

One of the most common criticisms of the Service was that we were snobs. I do not think we were. The fact of the matter is that isolation or exclusiveness is a necessary insurance for anyone who wields the kind of power a member of the I.C.S. or I.A.S. wields. That is why we barred non-officials from our clubs. We wanted to be able to relax in those sanctuaries. If non-officials had been members, a careless word could have done considerable damage. And what about "undue influence?" Isn't it harder to say "no" to a chap with whom you had a drink yesterday, than to a stranger? And corruption. High Society crookedness always starts with social relations because no one is fool enough to offer a bribe to a man he doesn't know. I am not for a moment suggesting that all, or even many non-officials would like to get friendly with Service personnel for dubious motives. But it is difficult and embarrassing to distinguish. One more reason for sticking to our own backyard—we just could not keep pace with the Joneses, when the Joneses were affluent businessmen. We were old fashioned enough to believe that one should not accept hospitality if he was unable to make a return, a belief that seems to have since died. The convention of exclusiveness was carried so far that I.C.S. officers in the Judiciary had very little to do with the rest of the Service, as a precaution, I suppose, against being inadvertently influenced in their official duties. You may say that this was carrying the adage "Justice must *seem* to be done" to ridiculous extremes; but do you prefer what today is a common sight, High Court judges on terms of close and visible friendship with senior members of the Bar? I have no doubt that their friendship has not the slightest effect on their judgements—but ask the man in the street what *he* thinks. One final argument in favour of exclusiveness. None of us went to jail for corruption, none of us was even accused of corruption, until we became socialites. All right, I *am* a square.

Less than ten years after Independence, by about 1955, the picture had changed radically. The I.C.S. succumbed to power without responsibility. In the Centre as well as in the states, ministers had grown to lean increasingly on them, and their word had become a prime mover of Government policy. It is never a healthy practice for a permanent civil service to determine policy, precisely because a civil servant is by training and temperament unfit to understand the aspirations of the people, or the best ways of fulfilling them. We are truck drivers, not owners of trucks. We can cover the most difficult routes, but we are incapable of selecting the most profitable ones. Unfortunately, at about this time we began to see ourselves as truck owners.

Let me digress for a minute. When Govind Narain Singh was Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, and I was his Chief Secretary, I told him at a full Cabinet meeting, that it was no part of my functions to suggest policies. There was disbelieving silence for a few seconds. I added, "There are two things I can do, and one thing I am not competent to do. I can tell you if a policy is workable, according to Service standards. I can tell you the consequences of a policy. But I am not competent to tell you what policy to follow, because it is you, and not I who have to answer to the people. It would be unfair to influence your policy decisions from the safety of my own position."

He said, "But what if you tell us that all our policy decisions are unworkable?" I replied "Then get a new Chief Secretary."

During the whole of his tenure as Chief Minister he never consulted me about policy matters, except in regard to their feasibility or probable consequences.

But the I.C.S. began to see themselves as truck owners. This led to an unhealthy identification of the civil servant with the real owner, the minister, which in turn led to a loss of the objectivity which was his most valuable asset. When father turned, we all turned. When father was ditched, we ditched him first. If we saved the country from 1947 to 1950, we did our best to destroy it in the next ten years, not because we were unpatriotic but because we overestimated ourselves. It is no accident that every civil servant who became a minister was a political flop. We were just not cut out for the part we

sought to play, but our ambition to play it led to many things of which I, for one, am ashamed—to jockeying for position, to intrigues, to the mean things that small men do. And the tragedy is that we were not small men, not really. All that we did was to implement Peter's principle, each one of us striving to rise to the level of his incompetence. All of us would have done well, even brilliantly, if we had remained one grade below the level to which we actually rose. If the Government had allowed me to remain as a Commissioner, instead of promoting me to the post of Chief Secretary—*then* you would have seen something.

I have spoken about a dedicated sense of duty being one of the attributes of the Service. Refusal to do something mainly because it serves one's own interests should logically flow from such a sense of duty. It did in the past. Upgrading a post because you—or your wife's cousin—would get it was unthinkable; it was the good of the administration that counted, not your own. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, the post of Chief Secretary carried the same scale as that of Commissioner, and the Chief Secretary was literally and financially *primus inter pares*. There was a lot of sense in the arrangement. For one thing, the Government could select a relatively junior officer as Chief Secretary without causing heartburn. For another, the Chief Secretary, being nothing more than a selected commissioner, and sometimes junior to many of them, had to carry the commissioners with him instead of riding them, he had to discover in himself qualities over and above an ability to note on files. At that time the post was equated with that of Joint Secretary to the Government of India, and was on a fixed pay of Rs 3,000 per month. After the reorganization of States, efforts began to upgrade the post to that of Additional Secretary (Rs 3,500). The Boss, who was then Chief Secretary, resisted but ultimately the upgrading was done. Then, in 1969 or 1970, the Chief Secretary got another lift. The reason—since chief secretaries got only Rs 3,500 while secretaries to the Government of India got Rs 4,000, there was a flight of chief secretaries to the Centre. As no officer serving in a State can go to the Centre without the consent of his parent government, the validity of the argument escapes me.

This kind of upgrading was bad enough. What was worse

was the multiplication of senior scale super time scale posts. Like flood waters the proposals seeped through or outflanked the dams you erected against them. Take the states and the Centre, compile a comparative list of senior scale and super time posts every five years, and you will discover a rate of growth which would do credit to any Planning Commission. Parkinson only discovered his famous law—it was the services that put it into being. In doing so they inadvertently established a corollary which should be brought to Mr Parkinson's notice. The greater the degree of overstaffing, the less the work done. We do not need any more administrative reforms commissions; all that is required is to slash the number of senior posts in the country by half, and then let the remaining half get on with the job. They will do it far more efficiently.

Let me anticipate a very legitimate question. What did I do to prevent the evils I have described? Frankly, I tried and I failed. Like the ministers.

When independence came, members of the Service—British as well as Indians—were given the option of either continuing to serve under the same terms and conditions, or of quitting. Those who elected to quit became eligible for various sums of money by way of compensation. The scale of compensation was worked out by the senior members of the Service, and the manner in which they did so is a tribute to that objectivity which I have already praised, and whose loss I have lamented. The least compensation was admissible to the seniormost officers on the ground that they had completed most of their service and had correspondingly less left to compensate for. And these were the very men who had drafted the scheme! But that was the I.C.S. of 1947. I wonder if the same high principles would have been in evidence if the compensation scheme had been drafted in 1955.

A couple of years ago I had occasion to give a talk to some members of the I.A.S who had recently joined the Madhya Pradesh cadre. I reproduce the tape recording of that talk, not because I claim any credit for it, but because it is based on what the senior members of the Service had taught me when I was a fledgling. What I said to my successors is exactly what the I.C.S. at its best tried to be and to do.

“There are three main aspects of a civil servant's life—

1. Method of work.
2. Attitude to public.
3. Relations with ministers and politicians.

Here are my DO's and DON'Ts for each.

*Method of work*

"DON'T stop around in your bungalow office during office hours. Attend the main office every day punctually and have all your interviews there. This is the only way of ensuring that your assistants will be punctual. It is also conducive to the mental discipline that is so essential for a good civil servant. Your bungalow office is only for homework and emergencies.

"DON'T think you know everything about *anything*. Every time you have to deal with a problem, read up the law and rules unless you think you can make your own. If you do, you are still in the primary grade, and no one can help you.

"DON'T compromise with quality. Whatever you do should be the best you *can* do.

"DON'T take part in cliques and intrigues, they leave a bad taste in the mouth.

"DON'T treat your co-workers as if they are machines. Unless they like and respect you they will not give of their best, and without their best your own performance will be mediocre. Above all do not humiliate them before others.

"DON'T be afraid to take decisions. When you have to take them, take them as quickly as possible. This may get you into trouble sometimes but a civil servant who has never been in trouble is not worth his salt.

And finally DON'T be lazy. Remember that genius is one part inspiration and nine parts perspiration.

"DO take up at least some revenue appeals, they are the surest way of getting to know your assistants' work.

"DO be patient and give everyone a fair hearing. A civil servant who loses his temper and bullies people is an abomination before the Lord.

"DO learn the work of your subordinates thoroughly. Unless you do, you cannot inspect it with a good conscience.

"DO remember that there is no good work that is not inspected. Make your own inspections and ensure that your

assistants do likewise.

“DO make it a habit to drop in informally at the table of each person working under you from the junior-most clerk upwards, to see how he is getting on. Preferably on the opening hour.

“DO take the trouble to correct and explain rather than to merely condemn and criticize.

“DO treat the heads of other offices in the district as equal partners in a common enterprise, and if you are really as good as you think you are, ensure that your wife behaves in the same way with *their* wives.

### *Attitude to public*

“DON'T talk about being a servant of the public unless you are quite sure of the meaning of the phrase. You are a servant of the public because you are paid from the public exchequer. You serve them by ruling them on behalf of the Government. Every public servant from the *patwari* upwards is a ruler. The M.L.A. is elected by the people but as a member of the Vidhan Sabha he formulates the laws that rule them. You are the executive instrument that implements those laws and there can be no rule of law unless *you* rule. The ministers, the M.L.A's and you are all rulers—but rulers who rule in order to serve, rulers who rule for the public good and not for private gain. The ministers, the M.L.A's and you are servants of the public because all of you carry out the wishes of the public—but only as embodied in the laws formulated by the elected representatives of the people, not as formulated in mob slogans and riots. Failure to understand this basic principle is the root cause of deteriorating administration. The finest motto for a civil servant is in Housman's *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries*:

Whom God abandoned, they defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay.

In moments of crisis and stress the saner elements in the public look to you for two things—a constructive lead and protection from antisocial elements. Do not fail them. Do not be afraid to rule in order to serve.

"DON'T lose confidence in yourself. No crisis can last for ever, and if you keep your head the odds will be in your favour because public opinion is bound to swing round to your side. At the worst moment, dig your heels in and hang on to the rope, you will win the tug.

"DON'T be afraid of being wrong. But if you are, admit it gracefully and you will find the public will not hold it against you. The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who abstains entirely from action of any sort.

"DON'T be condescending. Treat all as your equals, with the same courtesy and consideration that you would show to fellow members of a club.

"DON'T give false hopes to the public. If you have to say "no" say it politely and without stuttering—the woman who stuttered had eleven children.

"DON'T pass the buck by blaming the Government or a superior officer for an unpopular decision. It is your duty to support and execute the orders you receive from competent authority. If you criticize them, you are a coward, because you are letting down your team.

"DO identify yourself with the hopes and aspirations of the people you serve. Always remember that people are the important thing, not reports and files. You will be remembered by what you have achieved for the people—always think of them as *your* people—and not by what you wrote.

"DO learn all you can about "your" people because without this knowledge you cannot help them effectively.

"DO be willing to meet the public without let or hindrance because this is the biggest single check on corruption and exploitation.

"DO take an interest in what the other departments are doing in your district and help them all you can. Working in a watertight compartment is never successful (unless in a submarine).

"DO turn a deaf ear to backbiters, tale-bearers and flatterers. One successful way of doing so is to change the topic of conversation by telling them one of your allegedly funny stories—the duller the better.

"DO retain your sense of humour. It will make even the worst situations bearable.

*Relations with Ministers and Politicians*

"DON'T allow yourself to be identified with any person or party. In certain circumstances this may cost you a degree of inconvenience, but it will at least keep you out of jail.

"DON'T allow yourself to be pressurized into any action which you feel to be wrong. In case of trouble, there is going to be only one scapegoat. Guess who?

"DON'T ask for favours, e.g., a particular posting or job. There is always a price of some sort to be paid in these matters and you may find it too high.

"DON'T talk too much. A seasoned minister or politician will not be impressed and the others don't count.

"DO implement all Government policies with dedication and to the best of your ability even if you disagree with them. This is what you are paid for and it would be positively dishonest to do otherwise.

"DO state your views honestly but without exaggeration and resist firmly any temptation to play to the gallery. This also is what you are paid for.

"Above all DO remember the phrase *caveat emptor* and take nothing on trust. In the last analysis, you and you alone are responsible for what you do."

## II

The British members of the I.C.S. left in 1947. The Indian members were liquidated by efflux of time. There was no fresh recruitment to the Service and it was substituted by the I.A.S. For us the first fruits of independence were distrust, doubt, and dislike, from the new rulers of the country, not so much because we had prosecuted them as because they had attacked us unceasingly for twenty years, and wondered whether we would try to get a little of our own back, now that they had to depend so much on us. There were some amusing incidents—at least amusing in retrospect. One of the ministers ordered me to accompany him to a village on the outskirts of Nagpur, as he wished to examine the food distribution arrangements there. He started his meeting by asking for complaints. After some discreet prodding, one person got up and said that the *juar* supplied from the local

ration shop was old and damaged by insects. The minister turned triumphantly to me and demanded "What have you to say to that?" I said, "This ration shop was opened as a result of political pressure although there was no need for it. Initially we supplied ten bags of *juar*, and over a period of six months only one bag has been sold. That is why the grain is infested." The Indian villager is essentially fair-minded. There were approving murmurs and the minister did not pursue the matter further. But later on, in his speech he returned to the attack. He said "This man sitting before you is a member of the I.C.S. Yesterday he was your master, today he is your servant. He is your dog, you can do what you like with him, today is the day of the people." Another attribute of the Indian villager is innate good manners, and the disapproval in the silence that followed could be felt, even by a minister. When the speech was over, I asked for permission to explain the Food Department's point of view, although I had no intention of expressing anyone's point of view except my own. I made a very brief speech, but it drew more applause than the minister's. I said, "It is quite true that we, government servants, are now your servants. But it is also true that we were always your servants, and you will bear witness that we tried to serve you to the best of our ability. In regard to the matter of dogs, I am myself extremely fond of them, and if you treat us as I treat my dogs, I am sure there will be no complaints." Later on, the minister in question was ticked off by Pandit Ravi Shanker Shukla, the Chief Minister.

I have related this incident, not because it is of any importance in itself, but because it illustrates the attitude of at least some politicians towards the I.C.S. Naturally, when the I.A.S. was formed, it was dinned into them that they must be totally and utterly different from their predecessors. They were asked to be democratic, public spirited, dedicated, and patriotic, the implication being that we were not. If anyone had asked me—wisely, no one did—I could have told them that disappointment was in store. The politician's understanding of the qualities enumerated are not exactly the same as the administrator's. When he speaks of democracy, he has in mind the greatest good of the greatest number—of his supporters.

Public spiritedness refers to that section of the public which has voted for him. Dedication means dedication to himself. And patriotism—well, your guess is as good as mine. The unfortunate young men who joined the I.A.S. discovered to their surprise that we were very much like them, that we shared the same values and the same interpretation of terms, that we did have a sneaking fondness for our country which could be called patriotism, and, most important of all, that we did not consider them to be upstarts. In short, they missed the bus. They could have been democratic, public spirited, dedicated, and patriotic, as defined by the politician. Instead, they remained honest to themselves and to their Service. It has always surprised me that no one accused us of corrupting them. In later years the politician began to compare the I.A.S. nostalgically and unfavourably with the I.C.S. They were incompetent, they were lazy, they had no spirit of service, and so on and so forth. If the I.C.S. had remained in existence as a service, exactly the same things would have been said about us.

I would like to set the record straight. Some of the finest men who worked with me have been members of the I.A.S. They were every bit as good as any I.C.S. officer I have known. There are, however, two factors that weight the dice against the I.A.S. What makes or mars an officer is the first few years of training, not the academic training that he gets when he joins the service, but the practical training he receives at district level, getting to know people and their needs, getting to know problems and their solutions. In the circumstances of today the Collector simply does not have enough time to devote to the training of the young officers attached to his district. It is not that the Collector's official work has increased and overburdened him. The real difficulty is VIP visits which keep him dancing like a cat on hot bricks. A friend of mine, who was then Collector Raipur, kept a record and found that 194 days in the year had been occupied with looking after ministers on tour. It is no use saying that these courtesies can be handled by the Headquarters Assistant; ministers want the best, and to them there is no substitute for the Collector. This leaves little time in which to train the Assistant Collector. The other factor is even more damaging. I have mention-

ed the politician's distrust of the I.C.S. Today the politician distrusts the I.A.S. man twice as much, although the distrust stems from a different root. He distrusts him because he belongs to an all-India service, whose loyalty must be more to the Centre than to the state. This is utter nonsense, but the politician believes it, and it is what he believes that is the important thing, not the truth. Any politician will tell you that he prefers a state civil service officer to one from the I.A.S., as a collector, and one of the headaches of a chief secretary is to persuade his government to accept the annual quota of I.A.S. probationers. At state level, therefore, the I.A.S. is a foundling. So far as the Centre is concerned, he has been put out for adoption and they wash their hands of him. The state can kick him around as much as they please and the Centre will not interfere, even unofficially. It is only when the state proposes dismissal that the Centre is consulted, and then they content themselves by passing the buck to the Union Public Service Commission. Washing their hands of the blood of innocent men was a popular pastime in the Home Ministry. All this leaves the I.A.S. in the unenviable position of being disliked by the states and disowned by the Centre. It was a source of never-ending astonishment to me that they could function at all.

There is a good case for radical revision of the recruitment rules to the all-India services. I had made some proposals in this regard when I was Adviser to the Governor of Punjab, in 1968, but the Home Ministry shelved them. Briefly, the idea is to limit open market recruitment to the most junior level of the state civil service. After working for three years at this level, the successful candidates will have two chances at the limited competitive examination for the senior level of the state civil service, the level of deputy collectors. After eight years, deputy collectors throughout the country will compete for entry to the senior scale of the I.A.S., there being no recruitment to the junior scale. The successful candidates will constitute the I.A.S., and open market recruitment will be abolished. I.A.S. officers will be posted to their parent states unless any state needs more officers than can be provided by the successful candidates from that state.

While I am riding this particular hobby horse I may as well

dispose of a hoary old chestnut—that having officers from other states makes for a more independent administration, an administration less susceptible to local political pressures. Nonsense. An officer resists political pressures either because he is built that way, or because he knows that he will be protected if he does the right thing. An I.A.S. officer is protected only by his virtue and a few admiring remarks in the lobbies of the Home Ministry. If you think *that* is adequate protection, you are welcome to your opinion.

There is a time in the life of every man when he must have courage enough to bear witness to the truth. Preferably at the tail-end of his life, when nothing very much can happen to him. Here then is a truth; different pay scales for the different all-India services are totally unjustified. The qualifications are the same, getting in would be equally difficult if the higher scale of the I.A.S. did not attract more competition, and the responsibilities are equally onerous. Building a two hundred crores dam causes just as many—or more—sleepless nights as handling a riot. The only reason for giving the I.A.S. a higher scale is that the Collector thinks he is superior to the Superintendent of Police or the Engineer, if he draws a higher salary, quite forgetting that a junior Collector won't. The worst result of this discrimination is the number of brilliant technical men—engineers and even *doctors*—who are wasted in the I.A.S., square pegs in round holes, attracted solely by the financial rewards. I *think* the Government's failure to redress an obvious injustice is due to the fact that the I.A.S. officers who have dealt with the file up till now have all been married; the female of the species is notoriously more status conscious than the male. Let the matter be examined afresh by officers who are bachelors.-

## V. THE TRIBALS

### FROM HOPE AND FEAR SET FREE . . .

My acquaintance with the tribals, who comprise one-fifth of the population of Madhya Pradesh, began in 1940 when I worked for six months under Grigson, on the Aboriginal Tribes Enquiry. I studied them at first hand, I lived with them, I tried to understand them, in Sagar, Mandla, Raipur and Bilaspur. The association continued for thirty years. They evoke in me a deep sense of guilt. The worst thing that one race can do to another is to take away their living room. That is what we did to the tribals—by we, I mean our ancestors. The Aryans, developing from nomads into agriculturists, pushed them away from the fertile lands, and they took refuge in the hills and jungles. The British took away the jungles because the timber was valuable and the *shikar* attractive. Minerals were discovered in the hills, and independent India took away the hills. Now I suppose we will look for lebensraum for them at the bottom of the sea. When the East Bengal refugees began to be settled in the Dandakaranya Project, much of which is in Bastar district, I asked H.M. Patel what was going to happen to the tribals. He was optimistic about the benefits they would get through the opening up of the area, roads, schools, dispensaries and all the trappings of civilization. I asked doubtfully, "But what about their land? What will they cultivate, not now, but when their population increases?" There was no answer. There never is an answer to a fundamental question. The tribal has a low birthrate because

he lives on the edge of starvation. Because no one really cares whether he lives or dies, he has a high death rate. Naturally, the few forests and barren mountains that have been left to him are underpopulated. But with the awakening of a social conscience during the last twenty-five years his numbers are increasing, and by the time he needs land, there will be no land left for him.

It is almost impossible for a non-tribal, even for me, to comprehend what his land means to a tribal. It has a life of its own with which his life is inseparably linked, it is the mother goddess that gave all men birth, but because it is his land, it is *his* mother, with an umbilical cord that cannot be severed. If its fertility decreases and the crops fail, it is because the gods are angry with *him* and it is he who must make amends, with a human sacrifice if the omens so dictate. The sacrifice is not for his well-being, it is for the well-being of the mother earth who has suffered through him, and if he has to hang for it—well, he has to hang. When a man like this loses his land, something inside him dies, that something which made him a man. And it is the land that is the first casualty when civilization sweeps over the tribal. When he accepts money and executes a sale deed, he assumes that he is parting with his land only temporarily, only until it has produced enough and more for the new master to neutralize the amount he paid. I have seen a Gond in Rehli *tehsil*, standing with dead eyes before the *munim* of the *bania* who had bought his land, and asking "Have you got enough from the land to repay the hundred rupees I took?" He had sold his land twenty years ago. The *munim*, accustomed to such scenes, said briefly "Not yet" and turned back to his work. The little old Gond carried his dead eyes silently away. He would not have minded so much in the days when alternative land was available for the asking, or for the use of an axe, the good days a hundred years ago when he had the run of the jungle. But today the money he gets is preempted by his debts as soon as it comes into his hand, and the jungles are protected. Now it is not so much the individual who wants his land, (only the poorest quality is left) it is the state. Projects for irrigation require land for the dam and the canal, the contours require that it be the tribal's land. Iron and coal are discovered and the

country's needs demand their exploitation. The land is the tribal's. New railways cut through virgin territory—and the tribal's land. What centuries could not do, civilization has achieved; it has cut the umbilical cord between the adivasi and his land. I have no solution. I merely report a tragedy, the tragedy I saw pictured in the dead eyes of the Gond, "from hope and fear set free."

When Dr Rajendra Prasad, the President, visited Bastar he talked to me about the development plans for the district. I blurted out that I had only three objectives—two square meals a day for my people, protection for their land, and a degree of education that would enable them to be the exploiters instead of the exploited. He said, "They don't look starved." I replied, "Sir, you should see them at the beginning of the monsoon, when their rice is finished and the wild roots of the jungle are not yet ready. Last year, during the rains, I had to cross a flooded river in dugout canoe paddled by a Muria. The current was very strong, and in spite of the fact that I helped out with one of the paddles, he could not hold the canoe diagonally against the flow of the river, with the result that we had to return to the bank from which we had set out. When I swore at him, he said, quite simply, that he had not eaten for three days. I gave him a meal, and the results were dramatic—two hours later we crossed the river with the greatest of ease." The President was evidently sympathetic about two of my objectives. Within a few days my demand for development funds was met, and within an equally short time legislation which I had been pressing for, to protect the adivasi's land, was passed. Alas, it did not protect him against Government acquisition!

I have lived long enough to see my third objective on the way to realization. I was Commissioner Jabalpur Division in 1958 when some Gonds came to me with long faces. They were from a tiny jungle village in Seoni district, and their grievance was serious. The *Patwari*, instead of visiting them once a year on his *rasad* tour—a tour to collect rations for the year—had started making *rasad* tours almost once a month; he had fallen in love with the ghee they produced. This was a burden they found unbearable. They did not want official action, they would deal with the problem themselves, but would I kindly

look after them if there was trouble? I said I would. As an afterthought I added that it would be desirable for the *patwari* not to die. There was uproarious laughter. Certainly he would not die, they would not lay a finger on him, all they were going to do was to give him ghee. And they laughed again. A couple of months later, the *patwari* took the unusual step of asking for a transfer outside the district, and the application came to me with a forwarding endorsement from the Collector. He wrote that the *patwari* believed he had been bewitched, certainly he was in bad mental shape, and the transfer was recommended. I transferred him, and the next time I toured Seoni district I dropped in on my Gonds. They were quite frank about the matter. "We mixed tiger's fat in the ghee, and you know what that does to a man." What it does to a man is make him behave like Casanova. "And then we sent the Brahmin *pujari* of Baghdeori to tell him." The *patwari* was himself a Brahmin. It was bad enough that he had eaten tiger's fat and suffered for it, now another Brahmin knew what he had done. No wonder he wanted out of the district.

This chapter is not intended to be a thesis on the aborigines. Its only purpose is to introduce you to the tribal as I know him, in the hope that you will see a human being and not a museum piece.

#### ABUJMARH DIARY

6 January 1950—Started by car for Kokometa in Abujmarh, where one of our cloth and salt shops has been running very successfully since last June. Arrive at threeish and am greeted by Mukaddam, rather amusing old sinner who claims to be friend of mine. He ought to, as I have given him the only gun licence in the Abujmarh and have taught him elements of shooting. Long tale of woe. Graziers have brought their cattle near village and wild buffalo has joined them. Wild buffalo prevents cattle from being milked, which hurts graziers, and spends spare time in eating Abujmarh's mustard crops, which hurts Abujmarh. Strongly suspect this is made up for my benefit so that I will shoot buffalo. However, proceed dutifully to investigate and somewhat to my surprise, find story true.

Graziers and Mukaddam unanimous that buffalo should be shot.

Build myself a convenient *machan*, set up my camera and await return of wild buffalo with herd. He arrives in due course and is photographed. Expectant multitude awaiting shot, make barbed remarks regarding my cowardice. Wild buffalo chases them and earns my gratitude. I alight from *machan* and point out, very reasonably, that multitude, tame buffaloes, and wild buffalo were so mixed up that excessive number of targets made shooting impossible. Explanation received in cold and disbelieving silence.

Wild buffalo sits down in middle of tame herd. I suggest that some one go in and make him rise. Remark ignored. I throw halfhearted clod of earth at wild buffalo and beat him to tree by shorthead in ensuing race. Honour being satisfied, wild buffalo saunters off to forty yards. Am urged unanimously to shoot it. In reply, gesture towards rifle which I had shed as unfair handicap during race. Mukaddam brings rifle, eluding wild buffalo by inches in process. With effort of mental agility, I now claim to be unable to shoot from this tree, as I need two legs and at least one hand to stay on it. Mukaddam (whom I am beginning to cordially loathe by now) says, "Come down and shoot it." Buffalo chases him around herd for his pains. I seize opportunity to alight from tree and as quickly as possible climb tree with *machan*. This time, rifle stays with me.

Mukaddam (how I hate that man!) enlists aid of two other Abujmarias and all three partly entice and partly drive buffalo until it comes opposite my tree. Pressing invitation to shoot repeated. Buffalo sees me and proceeds to intimate that I am well and truly treed. Light is failing and I have no intention of spending freezing night. I slug buffalo behind ear with solid 423 and he is forthwith written off Forest Stock book. Graziers now claim they cannot have dinner with buffalo lying in front of encampment so will I please move it elsewhere. Send pickup for more Marias. Twenty arrive and job is done.

All return with me in pickup which is one of the minor miracles of space and an all-purpose vehicle. Am too tired for dinner, and sleep the sleep of the unjust.

7 January—Arise from broken slumbers, breakages being

due first to woman yelling her head off at about midnight and then to cold which made me climb out of bed and put on all available clothes. Am travelling without tent so have to sleep in leaf huts. Decide that Parnshala in winter is form of purgatory not fully appreciated by Valmiki. Enquire in morning with fine show of unconcern whether woman's yells were evidence of murder or merely result of husband's discipline. Am informed that she gave birth to healthy baby earlier in night and was thrashed as per custom. Am greatly intrigued by custom and speculate how it arose. Probably novel form of pain therapy. Forget cardinal principle that no Abujmaria will tell you anything if you appear interested, with result that they all clam up.

Hold open court for news and complaints. Am told that cultivated crops (in fields) are good but owing to early outbreak of monsoon, *pendas* could not be fired. *Penda* is form of shifting axe cultivation common in Abujmarh where areas are clearfelled, burnt and millets sown in them. Offer to send in rice from plains but am informed it is not necessary.

Allegations made against Forest Guard who beat Maria women engaged on road work. Promise to look into case and make note. Ganda (non-aboriginal) who cheated couple of Maria boys out of a bullock also reported. Find on enquiry that case has been registered by police who are doing everything necessary. Once more realize that complaint to Maria is like the pen of my gardener's aunt in French—repeated or applied to everyone. They have keen sense of injury and no sense of time, like Irish, only more so.

Leave for Kachapal at three (ten miles) accompanied by Mukaddam and *Pargana Majhi* (tribal leader in Pargana). Discover that Abujmarh is split up between villages by common consent and convention, leaving nothing for Government. Each village consists of about fifty acres of stable or shifting cultivation and five to fifty square miles of forest. Realize why shifting cultivation does not seem to have done much harm in Abujmarh—too much forest and not enough cultivation to seriously effect it. *Majhi* tells me *penda* rotation here is about fifteen to twenty years. Am struck by abundance of flat, fertile land which has not been touched and wonder for the umpteenth time why Maria is so childish. He will ignore land

next to him and go three miles to use a field which is probably no better.

Enter into limits of Irmbhatti after climbing (by estimate and gasps) about fifteen hundred feet. *Majhi* tells of dispute between Kokometa and Irmbhatti over two fields (about three acres—I saw them) which both claim. Decide that best solution is for neither to sow those fields and am hailed as Solomon. Then discover that the fields are in limits of Adasur which is deserted, but some of whose cultivators have settled in Kokometa. Still stick to original decision as two fields are cheaper than couple of murders. In any case no land revenue is involved, there is no land revenue system in Abujmarh. *Pargana Majhis* collect a poll tax of one rupee and six annas per male over sixteen per year and pay it into *tehsil* treasury. Census is taken for this purpose every five years, again by *Majhis*. This system which was introduced by Grigson in 1929 is probably the most important single reason why the Marh is still sealed off from the rest of Bastar. But it has become so set that it cannot be disturbed suddenly. However. Proceed further at slightly reduced speed owing to fact that I am engaged on interminable climb over gradient of 1 in 2 (it seems!). Decide that I must stop or burst my lungs. Save self-respect by asking *Majhi* whether villages are jealous of all rights in their jungles or only over *penda* rights. Cunningly stop to hear answer, roll cigarette and enter into discussion which gives much needed breather of ten minutes. Find from *Majhi* that these Abujmarh village forests are like reserved forests in sense that every action in them is a crime unless specifically permitted. (I got this from a definition by a very distinguished forest officer of the difference between reserved and protected forests.)

Tactfully enquire whether I may shoot peafowl just visible through tall (six-feet) grass, which seems to cover entire area not covered by big tree forest. Permission too enthusiastically accorded, with result that peafowl saves its life. Have not seen any valuable jungle even through binoculars. Everything is *sat-kata*, miscellaneous.

Arrive Kacchapal sixish, in time to attend a funeral. This area is in Sonpur Pargana. *Majhi* is surly old bird but must make allowance for fact that deceased was his sister-in-law.

From symptoms described she died of appendicitis, not noticeably improved by charms, purgative, and, as last resort, branding across stomach. Corpse is wrapped in bamboo matting and red cloth and carried lashed to pole. Burial is in lying position after removing cloth, and am told that some time later, stone will be erected when feast and other formalities are complied with. Considerable and energetic wailing which seems more ceremonial than genuine except in case of relations, who are deeply affected and hence do not make so much noise. *Pargana Majhi* of Kokometa returns from here but my old friend the Mukaddam signifies his intention of completing tour with me and returning from Jagdalpur.

8 January—Spend better night than previous one because I threw caution to winds and had a glorious fire in my leaf hut. Hear drums until midnight and suddenly realize that they are sending messages—very clear kind of code, something like morse. Am interested because I had always suspected there was drum code amongst these people. Confirm theory by asking *Majhi* in morning what message drums were sending. He says “That you have arrived and are going to Kutul today.” I bet there was lot more than that but he would not tell. Another mode of sending messages is by symbols. *Jamun* branch and piece of meat left on door step at night means “Your man was killed in hunt.” Bunch of chillies, arrowhead and symbol representing name of a village means “Assemble at such and such village in so many days (according to number of chillies) prepared for war.” There are heaps more. Notice that many people in village suffer from hydrocele and there is high proportion of scabies. Abujmaria’s attitude to human life very realistic—he is good to children because they represent assets and ignores aged because they are liabilities anyway, and he sees no reason to increase their span. He feels he is doing more than enough by taking no positive action to reduce it. This attitude not confined to Abujmarias but found in all primitives I have worked with. Wonder why every social worker from Thakkar Bapa to Elwin persists in euphemizing aboriginal. Surely it is possible to love and try to understand them without romanticizing their qualities. Strongly reminiscent of wife’s attitude to small son—infant prodigy angel instead of (what he is) attractive little devil. Statisti-

cally, nearly 70 per cent of Bastar's murders (which are about as many as in a whole M.P. division) involve father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother.

Leave for Kutul at nine. Early starts impracticable in Abujmarh at this time of year as night mist only lifts at eight and grass through which footpath runs is soaking wet for another hour. Mist has to be seen to be believed—visibility twenty feet in places.

See and photograph a tree house on way. Abujmaria camps in his field while crop is growing and lives generally in hut built in tree during this period, returning to village after harvest. Is celibate during this period.

Try to orient Survey of India map with actual landscape, aided by compass, and fail. Have already discovered that map is quite bogus as far as Abujmarh is concerned. Even village names do not tally and village locations on map are just wild guesswork. These villages change site and name every five years so map-maker's task is not enviable. Route I am following has been worked out by arithmetic and trigonometry to be in exactish centre of Marh, running north-south as closely as I can make it. Each day's journey is decided after consulting villagers and keeping due south. Technically I am well and truly lost but console myself with reflection that I still have seven days grain and can always shoot a peafowl—I hope.

Reach Kutul at noon. Long chat with locals. No complaints. Aboriginal always responds to humour and is a good-natured chap generally. Find *ghotul* building in village and discover that these do exist all over Marh but only the boys (*chelik*) sleep there at night. Once in week there is dance and then girls too go. Boy who wants to "make" a girl offers her conventional drink. If she accepts—well, she returns home at dawn. My Mukaddam (the Kokometa one) remarks patronizingly that Abujmaria is not like plains Muria who has no morals. In the Muria *ghotul* the girls sleep out every night—here it is a weekly treat. I thank thee O Lord that I am not as other men. I ask what if there are pregnancies. Boy is fined and girl is married off to husband already selected by her parents who also accepts child as his own. But I am assured that such cases practically never occur because it is only a weekly affair. Shades of Marie Stopes!

Incidentally find that fertility amongst Abujmarias is very low even for aboriginals (where it is lower than elsewhere). Childless marriages are frequent and where there *are* children the number is not more than two or three per family. Certainly not due to birth control, because children are passionately desired. Wonder if this caused by practically fatless diet or prevalence of filaria. It is certainly not due to venereal disease or yaws. I have seen no cases yet.

Find a man whose parents were Gonds of Panabaras and came in and settled in Marh. After their death Abujmarias accepted him as one of themselves and got him married to a Maria girl. He was born in the Marh; but in two other cases, Maria boys who had gone to work in the plains married Muria girls and brought them home. There seems no feeling at all against Maria—Muria or Maria—M.P. Gond or even Maria-non-Gond marriages, although naturally they are not frequent because opportunities are lacking. Had always thought, with Grigson, that Maria is strictly caste or tribe bound—obviously not so.

Kutul people (four of them) have been as far afield as Alapalli (Chanda district, eighty miles) and most of them have visited Narainpur. But not one has crossed range of hills dividing Narainpur area of Abujmarh from Kutru area. They reasonably point out they have no reason to.

Enquire regarding complaint of Forest Guard beating women. Denied unanimously. *Majhi* Wanja who was cited as witness by complainant in Kokometa says nothing of sort happened to anyone in his *pargana*. Have been climbing more or less continuously since Kokometa and must be over three thousand feet by now.

Discuss further route with wise old men and find little help. They say Gomangal is due south one day's journey for a Maria—twenty to thirty miles. Dhurbeda is on way. Decide to make for Gomangal on 9th via Dhurbeda.

9 January—Early start—eight. Climb steadily for two miles and get a lovely view from top of rise.

Pause for photographs and breath. See various patches of *penda* and am told rotation is ten years here as jungle grows fast. See patches of bare hill but am assured that *penda* has never been done. Wanja *Majhi* (who is seeing me as far as

Gomangal) says no one does *penda* unless jungle is really dense "for who would marry a bald-headed woman?" Closely examine some patches and find his version true. No cutting has ever been done here, nevertheless trees are sparse and area looks bare. In next four miles mentally analyze cultivation seen and find (a) *penda* on hill slopes is rotational or shifting (b) occasional *penda* on level ground is preparatory to stable cultivation, i.e., land is sown after burning for first year and thereafter cultivated regularly (c) *penda* is only done in poor soils where *kosra* (minor millet) will grow and not in rich soil (d) some little rice being grown in rich soils and am told its cultivation is extending, but such areas are in minority. Main crop is still *penda*-grown *kosra*, and (e) Wanja Majhi says there was no rice cultivation five years ago but people going to Alapalli (Chanda district—eighty miles) for work have seen it and started such cultivation on return.

Conclude that Abujmarh in Narainpur *tehsil* at least is progressing fast.

Forest still of *sat-kata*, miscellaneous type and not much value except for some scraggy bamboo. See plenty of signs of sloth bear and some of Sambhar.

Reach Dhurbeda at eleven (ten miles) and pause to let equipment catch up. Find population assembled to greet me and am presented with massive tuber by headman in token of receiving freedom of village. Give him cigarette in return and photograph him, solo, with Majhi, and with self. Looks very Australian aboriginal. Abujmaris differ widely in appearance, from red-bronze almost Caucasian type, through very dark symmetrical Dravidian type, to absolute primitive bushman type. Just near Dhurbeda saw unique sight and am still regretting inability to photograph it. Maria girl having bitter quarrel with sister in dense dark jungle, lit by couple of rays of sunlight (1/100 Sec F 4 Super XX—this conveys the scene to photographers) was so engrossed in quinine of human unkindness, she forgot to run when I and party turned corner. For moment she froze. Sister had back to us. What a picture! And then both were gone, running like deer. Dravidian types like Sunil Roy portrays, goddesses in that lighting.

Again enquired regarding complaint against Forest Guard—again told it was completely false. Forest Guard exonerated.

From two miles before Dhurbeda, have been going over level ground between two long ranges of hills, running north-east and north-west respectively. Must be about 3400 feet up. According to compass, since yesterday, the sun rises in north-west. Am now relying on wristwatch and sun for direction.

Dhurbeda is somewhere about the exact centre of Abujmarh. Richer soil than Kachapal and even Kutul. In fact good agricultural land all the way from Kachapal in patches.

Reach Gomangal at about three, fairly tired but still have another seven to eight miles in my legs. Have usual meeting in the evening and treat a few cases. Hope the Medical Association does not take action. Apart from quinine, mepacrine, castor oil, itch ointment and dysentery mixture, I use Aspro for everything else, so cannot be doing *much* harm. Find people from here also go to Alapalli to work for Forest Department. Ask tactfully why they do not come out on P.W.D. or Forest road works in this district and get the answer after much patient questioning. Here payment is by piece work and is really ridiculously inadequate. The Forest pay Rs 30 to Rs 45 per mile of road (*kacha*—repairs) but this includes temporary bridges. The average share of a man for fifteen days work comes to eight annas. It would be much more honest to call it *begar* and get it done free! As for P.W.D., real objection is that labour is of unaccustomed and back-breaking type and payments are made very late (once in month or even two months on Gidam-Bijapur section). I know executive engineer is doing his best to solve payment problem but it is almost impossible for one S.D.O. to observe financial rules and make payments more frequently. I am convinced that Abujmaria will turn out in satisfactory numbers if paid a reasonable wage daily. Have no trouble at all in finding carriers at five annas per day (not more than twelve miles—if trip is longer, two sets have to be used) and they think I am generous. Normal daily wages on site or near village are only four annas.

After meeting, am called to visit case of veterinary nature. Cow with swollen ear. Local *gaita* (witch doctor) watches with cold hostility. As I do not want to incur his anger I invite him to have first go. Much epileptic jerking, wailing and foaming at mouth and then he takes out assortment of dried

leaves which are burnt under cow's nose and emit vile smell. Owner of the cow says this has been done twice before and cow is not better, moreover *gaita* charges one bottle liquor for each treatment. I tell him sternly that we doctors are worth our fees and get to business. Explain that evil spirit seems to be in cow's ear but this must be verified by magic first. Increase of interest at once in crowd. I take out rupee and announce that I shall send it to find where evil spirit resides. I then vanish rupee and call to it in loud voice to tell me where evil spirit is, repeating answers for benefit of non-psychic audience. Eventually walk over to cow and ask rupee where it is, ultimately producing it from cow's ear. Having thus located source of trouble (amidst tense silence broken only by small boy who bursts out crying and is led away in disgrace), I proceed to treat. Very simple, a good dollop of Milton, 10 per cent dilution in ear while cow struggles. I then retire amidst general admiration and hope cow won't die before I leave village.

*10 January*—Distribute salt as usual. This is the only time I have ever seen aboriginal abandon usual gentlemanly indifference—he is definitely eager to get his salt. Must try some *gur* next time.

Visit patient of previous night and find Milton has worked like real magic. Swelling almost nil and pain seems to have disappeared. Repeat treatment and leave village like hero.

The route is now level except for negligible little hills of four or five hundred feet which I take in my stride with a sneer. From Kutul, the physical characteristics of Marias found seem to have been steadily changing. Up to Kutul, the reddish brown type is in majority, after Gomangal it has almost disappeared and the bushman type is coming into prominence. Particularly in Kokopar which we enter at about eleven.

The landscape too is changing. There is less fertile land and more black rock. The cultivation both shifting and stable is more intensive after Dhurbeda (before Gomangal). There are more patches of stable cultivation. Have seen bundled rice fields in Gomangal and irrigation in Kokopar.

Am acquiring quite a fondness for my Kokometa Mukaddam, in spite of his being a confounded scoundrel. Largely, I think, because he is always cheerful and irrepressible. More-

over he is so naively in love with his own cleverness that his villainies are always transparent. At Kokopal he produced a land dispute case for decision. Parties belong to Gomangal and I shall reproduce case in some detail because it gives insight into aboriginal psychology. Chamru Madia was minor when parents died and could not look after all his land so he lent some of it to Masu. Now Chamru wants back field he lent to Masu about eight years ago and has been asking for it repeatedly and in vain. First I question Masu who says he has cultivated land for many years and it is his own. He has not lied. He *has* cultivated it for years and he feels it should be his own. Insight no. 1 into aboriginal mind. He will seldom tell a lie but he is an expert at *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*.

Then question Chamru who states facts already mentioned. Verify from old men of village and decree in favour of Chamru. To ratify decision, prepare document in English with all the Latin phrases I can remember and decorate it with rough sketch of tiger and a man on stilts, which are the only two things I can draw. Sign it and seal it from lac provided by aboriginal, with three seals, first of my signet ring, second of .256 cartridge case and third of buckle of my wristwatch strap. Last looks most impressive. Deliver document to Chamru and carefully explain decision to Masu, who accepts it more gracefully than I had expected.

Shortly afterwards, surprise my Mukaddam and *Majhi* of Chhote Dongar (in whose *pargana* I am at the moment) accepting Rs 2 from Chamru. On questioning, my Mukaddam says that is fee which *panchayat* would have charged and it seems a pity that *Majhi* should miss his share because I decided case. On further questioning, admits blandly that he will keep Rs 1 for himself as *Majhi* did not have courage to demand fee. Lack moral courage to argue matter and anyway cannot let down *Majhi*, so change subject but obtain insight no. 2 into aboriginal mind.

Later on ask Mukaddam why they did not decide case in *panchayat* and earn their Rs 2 honestly. He says, with pity for my ignorance, that one of the two parties was going to be annoyed at decision so why earn annoyance when I was there to take it. Insight no. 3.

Notice that younger aboriginals are relatively clean

older ones (over forty-five), are filthy and wear coat of ashes against cold. Very young children also wear ashes.

Enter Adar about one (twelve to fifteen miles). Village assembled to greet me with inevitable yam in headman's hand. Also see five cases of hydrocele and a very obvious case of leprosy.

Desultory conversation. These people are the wildest Marias I have seen. Enquire regarding *ghotul* and find it is of different type to Kokometa and Orchha. Boys sleep there purely because there is no room at home. No dancing and no communion with the other sex. For aboriginals, they lead a really dull life.

Am told that in living memory, not even a *chaprasi* has come to Kokopal or Adar, which gives me a first of sorts.

Information regarding dancing was given by a boy of Kutul who happens to be here on visit. Local *cheliks* most indignant and have just come to tell me that not only do they dance but will put on show for me tonight. Unwillingly dig up Rs 10 for feast and try to look pleased.

Dance is put on at six when almost dark. Village elders sit round fire while boys and girls perform usual buttock bells dance of Abujmarh. First song, as near as I can make out, is invocation to earth goddess to make land fruitful. Then hymns for good fishing, good hunting, even good *sulphi* (palm toddy) season. All very non-poetic and quite different from songs of Narainpur Murias particularly around Alanar, which have genuine poetry in them. Am captivated by metal feather which boy is wearing and ask how much he paid. He says Rs 2 and I offer Rs 5. He jumps at it.

Take some flash pictures but not of the girls, except one from behind because they are already scared.

My Kokometa Mukaddam very officious and tries to act as master of ceremonies which is resented by village elders so I tell him to sit down, having by now realized his feelings don't require to be spared.

Have been calculating distances as well as I can, and think I am now eighty miles from Kokometa which means we will start descent of Marh hills tomorrow. Learn from enquiries that I can reach Bhairamgarh on third day by noon. Fully realize that if locals turn hostile I will not reach at all and it

would take a month for my District Superintendent of Police to trace me. Retire to bed on that sobering thought.

*11 January*—Early start (8.30) for Itul. There is frost on ground and huts. Photograph a complete Maria family with exception of married women, in front of their hut. Married women decline to pose and the two unmarried girls hang grimly on to piece of cloth round shoulders. Otherwise both sexes wear only loincloth. Also take close-up of three wise old men.

Find the road easier now. We are following valley going down between two ridges of hills. Am again intrigued by frequent bare patches on hills, *not* due to *penda*, and photograph one. Speculate as to whether due to iron. There is certainly ore here because Abujmaris smelt and prepare all their own iron requirements. And Rowghat deposits are on range of hills which run into Abujmarh. Imagine having enough iron in only two *known* deposits to last world for one thousand years. (This is a fact—Rowghat and Bailadila, both in Bastar, with ore that averages 70 per cent.) Geological survey of Abujmarh would be worthwhile. Perhaps gold or oil?

Stable cultivation not seen. Land is very poor and most streams look as if they would dry up by summer. Further notice that bushman type mentioned in Gomangal is now again disappearing and giving way to majority of reddish-brown Aryan and symmetrical Dravidian types.

Reach Korowahi at 11.30 and find Itul has disappeared. The people deserted it last year and in Adar, only ten to twelve miles away, there was no knowledge of this fact. Korowahi is new village one mile from site of former Itul. The case of the lost village.

But the Korowahi people knew I would not find Itul so built a leaf hut for me without being asked. Now you know one of the reasons why I am so fond of aboriginals.

Am in Kutru part of Abujmarh, south, and would have expected predominance of bushman aboriginal. Provisionally, judging by what I have seen, Abujmarh population consists of three different elements: reddish-brown Caucasian or Aryan type; black symmetrical Dravidian; and Australoid bushman type. The original must have been bushman who was squeezed into centre of Marh by successive waves of outsiders of two other types. At present I would say bushman type is 20 per cent

with the remainder equally divided between other two. Naturally, there is plenty of mixture but in spite of it the three types still stand out. Probably due to existing custom of cross-cousin marriage, which keeps racial types unchanged. Have taken several photos to illustrate, particularly one just now in Korowahi. Get my first news of outside world from Edka Maji (Bhairamgarh *pargana*) who has just returned from Kutru. Says Maharaja is there on *shikar*.

Talk with assembled population and find practically no stable cultivation in this *pargana*, not because they don't want to do it, but because there is no suitable land. Certainly on these scaggy hills stable cultivation will cause more erosion than *penda*. There is no objection at all to ploughing. Assembled population very friendly and watch with avid interest while I write this. So I draw a tiger and the man on stilts for them. First time my artistic efforts have ever been appreciated. Show naturally continues with binoculars which are passed from hand to hand, or rather eye to eye, and evoke gasps of astonishment. Then conjuring tricks, ending with my extra special of swallowing a matchbox and taking it out of (laced) boot which is on my foot. I wonder what reaction would be if they saw woman being cut in half!

Am attended by enthusiastic crowd of fans while I bath and shave and only reason why I haven't yet had my siesta is because they are still with me.

*Evening*—They put on dance without being asked and are so obviously keen to show off that I haven't heart to refuse. But this show is worth it. Very good part singing in excellent harmony, with yodelling effects. Wish I had a wire recorder. Discover that Abujmarias are keener on song than dance which differentiates them from other aborigines I have known. And all their songs have a break and change into higher key, very much like yodelling. Why is mountain singing yodelling like Swiss and Himalayan folk songs? Wide open spaces too, cf. cow-boy songs. There was particularly catchy song with refrain "*he mama, he dada, kokore ko kikorei.*" All about girl who is married to boy she loves but makes usual feminine fuss at time of wedding. Very jolly.

Abujmarias laugh easily and are a gay crowd with an enormous fund of vitality like all aborigines. Can hear them

now as I prepare for bed.

12 January—Early start again (8.30) as *tehsil jamadar* who has come from Kutru says next camp (Bodga in Khalsa, outside Marh) is fifteen miles and I might sit up for a tiger there if I reach in time. Kokometa Mukaddam very thoughtful for half an hour. I ask him what is the matter. Tells me very confidentially so that none can hear, "In this trip I have seen the whole Marh from north to south and all the *Majhis* of the *parganas* through which we have passed. Now don't you think they are a silly lot of owls compared to me? Why shouldn't I be a *Majhi*?"

Sit down on pretext of reloading camera and laugh silently for five minutes. Predict great things of old Moosra Mukaddam.

Climb down steadily for seven miles and reach plain which stretches for another three. *Penda* on hills is pretty intensive but plain is untouched and contains about fifty thousand acres of good cultivable land under non-descript forest, only bamboo being of value.

No stable cultivation at all in Bhairamgarh Pargana (from Korowahi on) of Abujmarh and no cattle. *Majhi* says "No cattle, no fields; but also no tiger," and insists that people do not keep cattle because they attract tiger.

Except for plain referred above land not suitable for stable cultivation and suspect this is real reason. Of course Abujmaria could come down into plains but is primarily hillman and would not like it—yet.

This is only *pargana* of eight seen in crossing entire Marh from north to south, where no cattle at all.

One obstacle to stable cultivation will be this absence of cattle. And stable cultivation not possible in barren Kutru part of Abujmarh. Notice that in spite of intensive *penda* (five-year rotation) lower slopes of hills are never deforested. Either amazing coincidence or aboriginal has dim sense of danger of erosion. Ask *Majhi* and am told it is "because the hill will fall away."

As neat a description of erosion as I have heard. And they say aboriginal is backward. Wish some of our "advanced" cultivators could understand danger of "hills falling away."

Reach river called in Maria, Kokomanda. Find it repre-

sents border of Abujmarh. Take farewell photo and look, and cross my rubicon.

#### MALARIA AND POYAMI MASA (1954)

If ignorance is bliss, this article will positively shriek with happiness. My qualifications for writing it are the same as my friend Poyami Masa's—we both have had all the types of malaria that were ever invented, but he is illiterate and I have to do the writing. This is a pity, because his style is certainly superior to mine.

An antimalarial unit started work in Bastar in 1949. They commenced operations in the towns of Jagdalpur and Kanker and a belt of villages around each place and the decline in the number of cases treated was immediate and spectacular. At the end of this article I have given the statistics on which this statement is based, but I would like to add that even a confirmed disbeliever in statistics like myself was enormously impressed, not by the figures, but by the obvious improvement in the health of the people. This was something one could see. Villages that had been notorious for their pot-bellied children changed in a few months into reasonably healthy spots. Even the surviving mosquitoes were non-malarious.

Bastar is fifteen thousand square miles of hill and jungle—and, until a couple of years ago, malaria. The population is nine lakhs, seventy-five per cent aboriginal. And the commonest picture is of an old man, covered with his entire wardrobe—(it's less than a mid-Victorian bathing suit) lying in the sun and trying to get warmer than the fever will allow. At least, it used to be the commonest picture; it isn't now, not since the *machar mar walas* got going. The second most common picture was of an infant with a tummy that would have been justifiable on his mother—just before he was born. When I first saw those stomachs, I thought of the famine cases I had seen in Bengal—it's peculiar that hunger and over-eating should produce such similar results... and malaria.... Then came the antimalaria squad and more trouble for an administrative officer. The aboriginals could not understand this business of taking blood samples, or

spraying the houses. Surely every one knows that blood is only taken for a sacrifice (and in case you think this statement is funny, please remember that we have hanged two men in the last three years for human sacrifice) while the spraying of white stuff on houses is obviously a form of magic. However, they were soothed in due course, and the work continued. After the first few months, we had more trouble from the so-called "civilized" people than from the aborigines . . . they thought they knew more than the antimalaria workers, and were continually wiping the DDT from the walls. But on the whole, the only real setback we had was due to the experts. With the most laudable scientific motives, they followed in the footsteps of the parade-ground sergeant who achieved levitation in two simple commands; "right foot off the ground; both feet off the ground": First they reduced the number of sprayings, then they reduced the strength of the spray, and finally they omitted the DDT altogether, using cheaper substitute. There was loud applause, but only from the mosquitoes.

In 1953, after a careful analysis of the results achieved in Jagdalpur and Kanker areas (we had of course gone back to the older practice and given up the DDT substitutes by then) it was decided to extend the scheme to cover a population of more than six lakhs in the district, and this was done. There were difficulties and I am not sure we have overcome them completely as yet. Means of communication are practically nonexistent and the huge trucks supplied are singularly unsuited to fair-weather roads. The villages are very far apart; the *paras* or hamlets are scattered miles from each other, in fact a single revenue village may extend over ten or twelve square miles; and even the houses are a considerable distance from each other. Naturally, this makes spraying difficult to do and even more difficult to supervise. The only remedy is surprise checks.

The aborigines have received the expanded programme with enthusiasm. It would be interesting to consider their reasons for this in some detail. They are not afraid of malaria because it kills them—it does not—but because it takes away the zest of living. It interferes with their *shikar* and their dancing and their elopements—it even interferes with their work, but this is not so important. "A short life and a merry one" is Poyami

Masa's philosophy, and malaria is objected to merely as an enemy of mirth. People *do* die from the consequences of the disease, but they are usually the very young or the very old . . . and I am not sure that this is a disadvantage in an overpopulated country, at least Poyami does not consider it a disadvantage. But if you live, you should feel you are alive, and the fever makes you feel you are dead (I am quoting him). In a nutshell, that attitude is the reason for the aboriginal's co-operation once he is convinced of the efficacy of the work. Fortunately, the results speak so eloquently for themselves that no other propaganda is required.

What of the future? Speaking with Poyami's ignorance but not his intelligence, I think the next ten or twelve years will bring new problems and it would be as well to prepare for them from now. Mosquitoes will acquire a resistance to the insecticides being used (in fact, the last one that bit me injected DDT, not malaria) and we will have to invent new ones or else supplement the present methods of malaria control with anti-larval work. I am told that it will take more than ten years for mosquitoes to gain such resistance. This may be true of American and European mosquitoes who are civilized, but I doubt if it will be true of our aboriginal mosquitoes; they are altogether more adaptable, more fitted for survival under adverse conditions, and more intelligent, when it comes to dealing with exterminators. Poyami told me a story to illustrate this, a story for which he vouches. In his village, the mosquitoes have discovered that sitting on a DDT sprayed wall means death. A mosquito bit his wife while he was watching. Instead of landing on the nearest wall when it had finished, it flew out, returned with a thin blade of grass, put the grass on top of the door, and sat on it. Believe it or not.

As the incidence of malaria is reduced, the resistance which the local population has acquired to it will also go down. Children who have been brought up in a controlled area will be particularly susceptible to the disease if they go to a place where there are no control measures in force. The answer is to extend these measures to the whole country, but I do not know whether the financial position will permit. I hope it will; but if it does, we will still have to face the greatest danger of all. Once malaria has been reduced to a negligible level, the

people grow careless. They stop taking the elementary precautions, they stop cooperation with the antimalaria squads. On the administrative side, we who are always on the lookout for means of economy, begin to ask the doctors why the scope of the work cannot be reduced now that the *Anopheles* has been practically eradicated. I have asked this question myself. And I was foolish enough to argue about the answer, which was that even if twenty malaria carriers are left alive, all the houses will still have to be sprayed, if they are not to find sanctuaries. I did not argue about Poyami's answer. He said, "If you leave gaps in the line of beaters, do you think the tiger will not break back?" It is a pity that Poyami will not be available at all the places where this question is bound to be asked in the future.

### THE THREE NAMES

Ours is one of the few remaining clubs in India where people come to meet each other rather than to play bridge. One of the reasons for this may be Rao, a thin and sardonic member, who has an enviable talent for making a story live. Rao speaking:

I first got into this story when some cultivators of Singhanpur came to me with the request that I should shoot a wild buffalo that was ruining their crops. I had no intention of shooting the buffalo but I was touring in the same direction, so I promised to look into the matter. A fortnight later I reached Singhanpur and they took me into the fields to see for myself what the buffalo had done. It was tragic, from the point of view of a small aboriginal community, growing only one crop of rice. Buffalo *do* poach in fields during the crop season, but this fellow had behaved with malicious forethought; he had not only eaten, he had rolled and trampled on what he could not eat. The fields looked as if a herd of elephants had been let loose in them. The leader of the village (the *Majhi*) said: "Our rice is gone. If we can get a crop of *kulthi*, we will be able to live. But the buffalo will not permit, he will come again when the *kulthi* is in ear."

It was early September and there were still tail-end showers from the monsoon so I did not relish what I had to do, which

was to stalk the fields at night and put a charge of salt, loaded in a 12 bore cartridge, into the buffalo. However, it had to be done. Short of killing, this salt trick is the only thing that will discourage a crop raider, and it's not very safe either. I went out that night and put a load of salt into his rump, after which the buffalo and I both ran like hell—fortunately in opposite directions. I returned to bed with a smug feeling of satisfaction.

The buffalo was back again the next night, and this time he not only ravaged the fields, he broke into the *badi*—the vegetable patch—of an outlying cultivator, and ruined *that*. They came to me in the morning with the news, an "I told you so" expression on their faces. The *Majhi* said "It's no good, you'll have to kill him. Or let us die of starvation." This latter was a bit of an exaggeration, but not much. The population of Singhanpur is forty and there are hardly forty acres under cultivation. I set out with them, carrying my 12 bore loaded with salt, and—just in case—my 465 as well. We picked up the tracks from the *badi* and followed into fairly dense scrub jungle. My friend Sudran saw him first and pointed and we all froze. He was standing broadside on, half screened by a clump of bushes, at a range of hardly thirty yards. It would have been easy to put a charge of salt into his rump, but not so easy to escape the inevitable consequences; there was a ditch behind and we couldn't have crossed it before he got to us. While I weighed up the situation, an idiotic Muria a few yards on my left, gestured at the buffalo, thinking I had not seen him, and said urgently, "There he is . . . shoot!" The buffalo headed for him. I dropped the 12 bore and grabbed my 465 from my gun-bearer, who hadn't moved an inch from his position one pace behind and to the right of me. You know old Madkami. I fired, trying to break the spine, and hit six inches to the rear of the shoulder blade, just below the backbone. The buffalo pecked, then swung round and made off before I could give him the left barrel.

We followed after a decent interval and although we saw him twice in the next eight miles, he never charged, neither did he give me a shot. That's the first time in my life I've bumped into a wounded buff that would not show fight. Another thing that struck me as peculiar was the fact that the Murias showed

absolutely no fear, and if there's anything they're scared of, it's wild buffalo. When we stopped in the evening for a rest, I remarked on this, and they told me a story that would have been fantastic outside our jungles.

Bogami Hirma was—and for all I know, still is—the witch doctor of the Sonabal *pargana*, and a redoubtable character by any standards. Remember the fuss there was a couple of years ago about someone raising the dead for his own purposes? Well, he was at the bottom of the whole thing, although we couldn't prove it. He woke up one morning to find a buffalo had damaged his *urid*. That did not worry him unduly, but the young men of the village made jokes amongst themselves at his expense; they said "Yah, make the dead work for you! And *you* work for the animals." It hurt his vanity. And to make bad matters worse the buffalo visited his fields again. Bogami disappeared for a few days. When he returned to the village he brought with him a strange assortment of articles, and at midnight he made the *puja* of the Three Names. That's one of the rituals I have never been able to attend; in fact the Murias won't talk about it, the Names are unutterable, even during the ceremony. It's a risky sort of *puja*. Apparently, if it goes wrong the man who's doing it dies. Like Poyami Masa of Eramner whom we found dead in a field—he had been making the *puja* of the Three Names, only something went wrong. But Bogami was luckier. He completed the ritual without mishap and he cursed the buffalo with the curses of the Names; one for each name. "You will always damage crops, and yet you will always be hungry. Men will always injure you and yet you will not be able to injure them. No weapon shall kill you and yet you will kill yourself." Then, for good measure, he put the Protection of the Tortoise about his fields, and went home to sleep, the old scoundrel! Three days later the buff showed up in Singhanpur.

Me, I have an open mind about these things. Don't laugh, I know I make sacrifices to tribal gods but that's a simple courtesy, and it usually pays off. Did I ever tell you about Kankalin and the man-eating tiger I shot at Kolar? Oh, all right I'll finish this story first. The buffalo made life miserable for the people of Singhanpur, and they in turn were not squeamish about his feelings. Before they came to me, they had already put a couple of arrows into him, and tried various other

methods of discouragement. They couldn't kill him, and, on the other hand, he refused the most tempting opportunities to kill *them*. Then they came to me and I couldn't kill him either. So obviously he was a *dev bhains*, a bewitched buffalo, or, perhaps . . . a buffalo god?

We tried to come up with him for two days and failed. I went about my usual duties after assuring the villagers that the buffalo was either dead or effectively discouraged. And everyone was happy—until the *kulthi* crop came in ear. The buffalo came with it, and as it was a smaller crop than the rice, he had almost completed its ruin before the Murias could get to me. I went at once, and this time I went to kill. Sudran met me as I arrived at the village. He was not optimistic. "It is a *dev bhains*. The curses of the Three Names are on it, and what are your bullets before the Three Names?" Nevertheless I waited for the buffalo in a field that night, and he was good enough not to keep me waiting long. It couldn't have been later than eight when he arrived. I took a slow and careful shot at his neck with the 465, using a solid bullet. The moon was nearly full and I did not need a torch, the night-sight showed up clearly. The flash of the explosion blinded me for a second. When my eyes recovered, there was no buffalo. I lay awake that night, wondering . . . Yes, you can laugh, but I'm not a bad shot and the 465 is not a bad rifle. (Rao is probably one of the best shots in India.)

We went back to the field in the morning and the tracks showed that the shot had been a hit, and a hit in the neck at that. The height of the bloodstains on bushes was conclusive proof. I won't bore you with a description of the follow-up. It was long . . . and as fruitless as the first time. The Murias went with a reckless disregard for safety, and I caught the infection after a while. I think they had begun to believe in the curses of the Three Names, and the second curse was our safeguard. Anyway, the buffalo did not ambush us. We pushed through the tall grass without even the hope that sustains one in the fatigues of *shikar*. When we circled back to the village, late in the evening, we were very tired.

A peculiar thing about the buffalo's grazing, whether in fields or in the *nala* beds where the tender grass grows, was that it never seemed to be serious. I mean, he picked a mouth-

ful here and a mouthful there, and never enough to fill his stomach. We noticed the same thing when we were following his tracks . . . casual browsing all the time. That night we discussed the whole affair at length, a sort of shooting post-mortem, and again Sudran summed it up. "We have seen the first of the three curses operating, and the second. He starves himself, and he cannot harm us. It remains only to wait for the third curse now. Put away your rifle." I left Singhanpur with a curious feeling of frustration, a feeling that was not due only to our failure. Sorry, I'm not expressing myself very well . . . it was a feeling that the whole episode had already been *arranged*, we were merely wasting our time in trying to rewrite the play. It would work out as it had been intended to work out, whatever we might do.

Singhanpur was pretty well ruined, but they did not starve—not quite. Fortunately a new road was being built and they found work on it, and afterwards the Malegaon coupe was auctioned, and they found employment there also. In the meantime I happened to meet Bogami, the witch-doctor, and I asked him about the buffalo. He blustered a bit at first but I soon cut him down to size, and then he admitted that he had put the curses of the Three Names on the buffalo. When I suggested that he recall them he nearly dropped. "*You* to say such a thing!" he said, reproachfully. "You know as well as I do that once the Three Names have been invoked, a curse can only be recalled by taking it on oneself." Well, I saw no harm in that, no one would really miss old Bogami, but I could hardly expect him to agree with me. And he didn't.

This year we have had no winter rains, and a lot of tanks and wells have dried up. People have to go two or three miles for water. The Singhanpur Murias had to go to Chipawand, a mere two miles, and would not have been seriously inconvenienced, by their standards, if it had not been for one thing. The buffalo took up his residence in a patch of jungle on the route to water and the patch could not be avoided because it was the only practicable route over a hilly portion of the way. There were precipices on either side. The women tried to avoid the buffalo by keeping to the middle of the jungle strip, but he kept to the middle too. Then they tried to avoid him by sticking to the edges and he took to the

edges as well. Worst of all, he chased them every time he saw them, and although they believed in the curse, they ran just the same, which meant the loss of the precious water, and another trip. He never actually caught anyone. The drought increased, and with it the nuisance value of the buffalo, until at last Sudran came to me for help. "If this goes on any longer" he said indignantly, "the *men* will have to fetch water!" So I went back to Singhanpur and resumed the quest.

We spent two days and a considerable amount of energy in looking for the buffalo. He seemed to have disappeared. I was hopeful that he had shifted his quarters, but Sudran disillusioned me. "He knows you have come, and every time you have come he has been hurt. He's lying low. Give him a rest tomorrow. Then follow the women and see what you will see." I took his advice, not because I believed him but because I was tired and needed a rest anyway.

The women giggled as they set off for water in the morning, with me trailing along behind. They made rude remarks too. "At your age! Does your wife know you're chasing us in this shameless fashion? You should stay at home with my mother!" I pretended to be deaf, and the remarks ceased of their own accord as soon as we reached the buffalo area. They were walking along the edge of one of the two escarpments which bounded the strip of jungle, five women in all—and myself a hundred yards in the rear. The buffalo came out with the quite incredible silence with which they move when attacking . . . and he came from behind the last woman. I cursed myself for a fool. . . . I was in balk, it was impossible to shoot without hitting one of the women. They screamed and the pots went flying helter-skelter as they scattered and ran. And then, suddenly, the women had disappeared, but the buffalo kept on his course, *straight for the precipice*. I was so flabbergasted, I didn't even fire. He kept right on. He went over the edge without the slightest hesitation, like a diver. There was a rumbling crash down below and a few rocks bounded from spur to spur.

When we climbed up to him from the valley (there was no way down from where we were) the buffalo was dead. He was a very old animal, with only one tooth left in his head, which may explain his restrained grazing. It may also explain that last

purposeful charge to his death. But when we examined him we found that my first bullet had broken his back, and the second—the one I fired in the moonlight—had passed through both carotid arteries of the neck. And *I* have never known 465 bullets fail to kill when placed like that.

When Rao finished his story, our doctor exploded. He's a nice chap, our doctor, but he does not know the ways of the jungle. "It's absurd! You must have been mistaken about the placing of the bullets. The buffalo couldn't possibly have survived if he had been hit as you describe. Or do you expect us to believe this business of the Three Names? Damn it, can you believe it yourself?" Rao finished rolling a cigarette, and lit it before he replied. "Can I believe it myself?" he said. "Can I believe it myself?" he repeated. "I wonder . . ." And there it rests.

#### IN THE WORLD OF THE ADIVASIS

(Broadcast from A.I.R. in 1974)

The human conscience is an elastic thing, fortunately for most of us. If it were not, we non-*adivasis* would have a permanent guilt complex. Look at the facts. First we took their land and pushed them into the hills and forests. Then we pushed them out of the hills and forests because we discovered valuable minerals there. All in the name of progress, of development, of the national interest. But it was only after Independence that we discovered there was such a thing as a national conscience, we began to feel that perhaps we had not been very fair to the *adivasi*, we embodied safeguards for him in the Constitution and made special provision for his advancement. For the last twenty-five years we have been lecturing him and uplifting him, and the politician as well as that peculiar animal, the social worker, have been assuring him, somewhat offensively I think, that he is their brother. Well, listeners, I have good news for you. In spite of all our efforts, the *adivasi* remains a better man than you or I.

In Madhya Pradesh as a whole, he comprises 20.63 per cent of the population and the main concentrations are in Jhabua, Bastar, Surguja, Mandla, Raigarh, Shahdol, Khargone, Seoni,

and Sidhi districts. The main tribes are the Gonds—there are at least fifteen sub-clans—and the Bhils. Two qualities are common to all the *adivasis*, a sense of humour and a sense of detachment. I think it is these qualities that have enabled them to survive the worst we could do to them, particularly our attempts at uplift. They stand back and listen politely while we describe the sterling qualities of man as laid down in the *Shastras*, in the intervals of selling them adulterated sugar and cheating them out of their timber. The humour of it occurs to them. Their very detachment enables them to perceive that our crookedness is a part of our way of life, and not something for which we should be blamed. For, as a Muria friend put it, "The hyena has stripes too, but you can't expect him to behave like a tiger, can you?" No resentment, no blame. Let me tell you some more.

The time is 3 p.m., the place is the Baiga Chak in Mandla district, the month is May and it is damnably hot. The occasion is a man-eating tiger. Doma Baiga, with whom I shot my first bison more than thirty years ago, is speaking, or rather, whispering. "There—beyond the *karonda*—is a patch of wet sand. That is where he is, I can smell him." So could I, in spite of the smell of Doma and of myself. We—or rather Doma, I was only his assistant in the matter of tracking—had been following this tiger for six days now, sleeping wherever we were when the dusk came. And there had been no time for baths. I breathed "Stones?" He shook his head, "There is no way out for him, except towards us. And he knows we are here, he is afraid, that is why we can smell him." I thought—the smell of fear, he must be able to smell us too! We were halfway down the bank of a steep *nala*, crouched behind a rock. The *karonda* was fifty yards ahead of us, and behind its shelter, the tiger. Doma gave himself a little shake, as if he had made up his mind. "There is only one way. I'll go down and walk towards him, keeping towards the opposite bank, he will come for me. Your aim is good." He was over fifty, his sole weapon was the little Baiga axe, and he was going to invite a charge from the tiger. I said, "No, I can't do it, what if I miss?" He looked at me, and there was, I swear, a little twinkle in his eye. "Then you will get another chance when he pulls me down. He has taken many of my people. There is no

other way." Before I could stop him he had moved soundlessly down the *nala*. Five seconds, ten seconds, then a coughing roar, and a blur of reddish yellow burst from the *karonda*. Doma swung up his axe and shouted, and there was something of the tiger's roar in the shout. For a fraction of a second the tiger checked, the heavy rifle kicked hard against my shoulder, then I was wiping the sweat from my palms and it was all over. I wondered if I would do for my people, any people, what Doma had just done for his. I stopped wondering, I knew I would not. There is a sense of identity, one for all, all for one, among the *adivasis*, which I have not found in the so-called civilized races.

Identification with one's community to the extent of being willing to die for it requires a degree of detachment from one's self which is hard to achieve. But the *adivasi* has achieved it. His attitude towards—I'm sorry, I can't think of a better word—Dharma, underlines the fact. To him, there are two, clearly separated, kinds of wrong. There is the wrong action that affects only the individual or individuals, and there is the wrong act that affects the whole community. The first type of wrong action entails consequences only to the doer. You commit a murder—well, you'll pay for it one way or another, and that's the end of the matter. But you commit the unforgivable sin of marrying a girl who is within the prohibited degrees of kindred—that's an entirely different matter, what you have done is *paalo*, taboo, you have committed a crime against the community. The punishment, as recently as twenty years ago, used to be burial alive. Now it is complete and utter ostracism for the man and his entire family. His hut is ceremonially burned, he is forbidden to enter the village, the *Majhi* or clan head tells him solemnly "Now you are dead, now you have no clan, go and do not return." It is a curious fact that men who have been outcast for such an offence seldom live more than a few months longer.

The consequences of this complete identification with the clan are not always tragic. There was a boy in a Gond family near Muki, which is in Balaghat district. He was subject to epileptic fits, and in one of them he had a vision of what he called the Unknown God. This god was invisible and formless, but he had very clear ideas about what people should do, and

his orders to the boy were definite and precise. Unfortunately they were not always sensible, but the whole clan took them seriously. Once I found a disconsolate group of women clustered outside the village—the Unknown God had decreed that no pregnant woman should remain in the *abadi*, which was hard on the women because it was raining heavily. Another time the pigs attracted his attention. No pig should have any hair on the ridge of its backbone. That was another sight I saw. The whole village was chasing recalcitrant pigs, all of whom were vociferously reluctant to be plucked. But the problem sorted itself out with *adivasi* commonsense in the end. My epileptic friend died in his sleep, and no one including the energetic *thanedar* ten miles away had any reason to suspect that it was other than a natural death. An epileptic lives, or dies, perhaps a little earlier than necessary—what difference does it make? The important thing is that the clan should live.

The Unknown God died as other gods have died. The *adivasi* lives, as I hope—without much hope—that we shall live. Because he has faith in himself, because he is real enough to live. Like the time I had an entirely teetotal V.I.P. inflict himself on my district. *He* had a pain in his stomach, or it may have been a cancer, a pain in the stomach is too low for a V.I.P. So his son-in-law and his daughter—or it might have been the other way around—deputized for him at a tribal festival in a *tehsil* headquarters. There was dancing, and if you think there was no drinking, you are more stupid than you need be. It was suggested that I should join the *adivasis*, and a V.I.P.'s daughter's—or son's—wish is a command. I did, and I flatter myself that my performance was at least not below par. I was complimented in somewhat invidious terms—to think that these innocent people can dance all right, without being tired, and without liquor . . . and you too! As it turned out “me too” was not the source of trouble, it was the *sulphi*. The sago palm, if tapped—and the *adivasis* are not so foolish as to leave it untapped—yields a colourless fluid which is rather like *neera*, but less sickeningly sweet. It also behaves like *neera*, only more so. If allowed to ferment for a few hours it turns into a very potent kind of champagne, aerated, sparkling, faintly acid and totally seducing. The dancers—and I—were drinking the more potent stuff, but we had a few pots

of the unfermented juice for guests. Tragically, however, the pots had got mixed up and now our distinguished guests got the wrong pot. It had immediate and foreseeable results. No longer amazed at my ability to dance so long and so vigorously, they did likewise, but without any noticeable muscular coordination. After my Gond friends had picked them up once or twice, they—the Gonds—ticked me off for having warned them to behave with circumspection. “Why did you tell us to be careful, these are nice people, just like you!” Just like me indeed. It took three Aspros apiece to get them on their feet the next morning.

Identification, detachment, and a sense of humour—that is our *adivasi*. As human values go what more could one want? And yet apparently, we do. We want lip service to the principles we profess but do not practise, we want conformity, we want the acceptance of our patronage. I do not think we will ever get it from the *adivasi*, and if we do, it will be the worse for him. To my mind, true culture is the ability to respect and understand values other than our own. The *adivasi* has this quality. Have we?

## VI. THE BEGINNING OF THE END

I was in Bastar for nearly six years, from 1949 to 1955, and the imprint it left on my mind can be summed up in this extract from a radio interview broadcast by AIR shortly after my retirement:

- Q. When did you attain the maximum happiness and job satisfaction in your service career?
- A. When I was Deputy Commissioner, Bastar, in 1949 through 1954. At that time the Deputy Commissioner Bastar was unique, like Pooh Bah in the opera, a little bit of everything. In addition to the normal powers of a deputy commissioner, that is, collector, he also exercised the powers of a conservator of forests, of a civil judge, of an income tax appellate authority, the administrative powers of the chief engineer, P.W.D., and any other powers he chose to assume. As a result, he could really get things done. For example, if I wanted to build an irrigation tank, once it was technically approved, I myself gave the administrative sanction and no brilliant young officer in the state capital had the opportunity to beat his brains out on the proposal. Much of the examination of any proposal really consists of picking holes in it, not because there are any holes, but because the officer making the examination has to justify his existence. I ought to know, I have done the same thing myself. But in Bastar this didn't happen, and in consequence ideas actually took

concrete shape on the ground. That sort of thing gives tremendous satisfaction.

I had gladly waived my chances of promotion in order to remain in Bastar. After all, Freddie Mills had served thirty years in the Naga Hills! But my wife fell seriously ill and a stage arrived when the doctors doubted their ability to save her with the limited facilities that existed. In those days, reaching the rail-head from the district headquarters meant a road journey of a hundred and eighty miles—and the road was not good, her movement by car was prohibited. In my trouble I did something I have never done before or since—I telephoned the Chief Minister, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, and asked for help. I explained what had happened and requested that the State plane be sent for my wife, adding that I would pay whatever amount was fixed by Government, if I was permitted to do so by instalments as ready cash was almost nonexistent with me. He cut me short brusquely.

“We’ll think about the payment afterwards. How long does it take for the plane to reach Jagdalpur?”

“About an hour and a half.”

“Have your wife ready at the airstrip in two hours.” He rang off. When I took my wife on a stretcher with the Civil Surgeon to the airstrip the plane was circling to land. As soon as it was down, Mone, the Finance Secretary stepped out, looking rather bewildered.

“What is this important financial matter which the Chief Minister wants me to discuss with you?”

I had served under Mone in Raipur district and took the liberty of saying “Sir, we can discuss financial matters later, my wife is dying and I would be most grateful if you could take her back to Nagpur at once.”

My wife was taken immediately to Nagpur. She was received at the aerodrome by Pandit Shukla and a galaxy of doctors and moved immediately to the Medical College Hospital. I could not leave Bastar at the time, but he looked after her as if she had been his own daughter, and she is alive today because of him.

Shortly afterwards, I was transferred to Nagpur as Member, Board of Revenue, and in 1956, when the states were reorga-

nized, I was posted as Commissioner, Jabalpur. Thereafter I served as a commissioner until 1961. This chapter deals with the years 1956 to 1961, when I had the opportunity to watch the Government moving, like God, in its mysterious way, from neither too close (the Secretariat) nor too far (the Board of Revenue). Massive changes were taking place and perhaps it would be useful for future generations to have a worm's eye view of them, as objective as I can make it.

We were brought up in the Micawber tradition of economics to believe that public administration must live within its means, or at least, its foreseeable means, count your paise and the rupees will look after themselves. We now learned that public administration was founded on the public debt, the bigger the better. Finding money for a project was no longer a problem; if the money was spent, it would be found. The viability of the project, and the benefits it would confer on the people were also irrelevant. What was required was a show-piece, rather like an old fashioned cinema, all stucco and single brick walls. A new phrase dominated our work, "financial targets." What you achieved was of no importance, it was what you spent that mattered, and how quickly you could spend it. One example—pickup weirs across non-perennial rivers or *nalas*. I must have been infected by the prevailing atmosphere of "hurry up quickly" instead of the *festina lente* (hurry up slowly) in which I had been trained, because I took to the idea with enthusiasm. The theory is simple and attractive. Throw a permanent weir across the stream, thereby creating a mile or two of dead storage, and irrigate the upstream reaches on both sides by using pumps. The average cost was a mere twenty thousand rupees. Unfortunately, there were two snags. Twenty thousand rupees is within the technical powers of relatively junior engineers, and the relatively junior engineers usually built the weir in the wrong place, with the result that the stream wiped it contemptuously out of the way in the first monsoon. The other snag was that the stream would not cooperate. When it could not breach the weir, it bypassed it by creating a new channel. If people had not been so kind to me, the dozens of unsuccessful weirs with which I littered Jabalpur division would have been collectively known as Noronha's folly, using a more robust Hindi word

for folly. Everyone realized they were a flop but to my surprise the idea caught on in other divisions *after* I had dropped it, because the damn things were a showpiece, because they could be built quickly, and most of all because they enabled minor irrigation funds to be spent instead of lapsing. No painstaking survey was necessary, no expert masons, no laborious trial borings. You built it, a minister performed the inauguration, and by the time it was washed away, everyone had forgotten it. I would not like to give the impression that a pickup weir is, *per se*, a losing proposition—it is not. But in the hilly country of this state, the construction of one requires a degree of technical excellence which cannot be found at the level of the person who usually builds it. At least one of my weirs was eminently successful. We spent less than twenty thousand rupees and even today it gives two waterings to the rice in nearly four thousand acres, just after the monsoon. The principal architect was Kashi Prasad Pande, a cultivator, and later the Speaker of the Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) for many years. He overruled all my junior engineers.

My father used to say that you cannot permit a rat hole in a dam unless you are prepared to lose the dam. Any relaxation of the Micawber principle in public finance leads to a general relaxation of financial proprieties which in turn leads to a slackening of moral inhibitions, to mass dishonesty and corruption. And lo! The rat hole has breached the dam. Let us forget pickup weirs for the moment and have a look at major projects. They were rushed through at a speed that made any critical examination impossible. The area to be irrigated was maximized in order to reduce the cost per acre of command, the life of the project was exaggerated, no attempt was made to ensure a regular flow of funds for each year of construction, and expenditure was controlled only by inability to spend more. The call was for speed, speed, and more speed—and for showpieces. No one bothered about the actual cost of irrigating the land which came under command. Later, when it was discovered that the cost was far more than the irrigation charges in force, it was decided to levy an improvement charge, payable in instalments, and based on an estimate of the amount by which the land that came under irrigation had

increased in value. Needless to say, in most cases this was never levied, and where levied, public agitation led to its withdrawal. In 1973—the year is only important because my calculations were based on it—I told the Planning Commission that the actual recurring cost of irrigation per acre from any new project was Rs 210. This included interest on capital and maintenance, but made no provision for recoupment of capital expenditure. It was inconceivable that any cultivator, particularly a small cultivator, could afford anything like this amount. His limit was an average of about thirty rupees per acre, which left us with a recurring loss of Rs 180 per acre per year. On paper, that is. Money never sticks to a cultivator's fingers. If he makes an additional five hundred rupees per acre per year as the result of irrigation—a conservative estimate—most of it is spent, and that is where Government gets its rake-off. Cloth, liquor, precious metals, iron, a bicycle, a transistor radio—everything is taxed. Over and above the tax on the articles purchased is the income tax on the profit made by the shopkeeper who sold them. And finally there is the invisible return to the State, the wealth generated by what has been spent, the additional cloth and cycles and transistors that will be produced as a consequence of the increased demand—all taxable. I calculate that in the long run the additional five hundred the cultivator gets, means an equal amount to the Government by way of taxes, direct and indirect. More than enough to make up the initial loss incurred. In many of the princely states, which it is now the fashion to decry, no separate charge was made for irrigation, although a little extra land revenue was recovered on irrigated land; perhaps the princes had a better understanding of basic economics than we have. All this I told the Planning Commission, and I suggested that our approach to irrigation should be based on the long-term benefits to the country and to the Government and not on the idea of a pound of flesh. But nothing happened. The wishful thinking continued, the paper command area, the notional improvement levies, the determined bluffing of self. This sort of thing is dishonest and dishonesty breeds dishonesty at other levels. The administrator or engineer who lied about costs and benefits was very soon lying about more immediately profitable things. And thus began the mental ap-

proach to corruption, which was later to become a way of life. The rat hole breached the dam.

Those were the days of the Bhakra Dam, the showpiece of India. In fact, the claims made on behalf of it would have been true if divided by three—the area irrigated, the power generated, the life expectancy. We are only beginning to discover this now!

During this period the decay of the Congress also began the beginning of the end, as 1940 was the end of the beginning of their rise. There were two causes for the decline, and it is an irony of fate that one of them was the same cause that had alienated the rural areas from the British. I have described in the first chapter how the British stood by and watched the village intermediaries who were their most loyal supporters, drowning in their debts, during the decade preceding 1938. The Congress now did something even more foolish. They abolished the new intermediaries who had stood by them so staunchly and who had borne with stoical courage the worst that the Raj could inflict during the '42 movement. In Madhya Pradesh, at least, there was no earthly reason to do so. Land tenures had been safeguarded to the point where the *malguzar* could not dispossess anyone without the concurrence of the state. Out of every hundred rupees of income collected from the village, the Government and the local body, the *janpad*, appropriated ninety-seven, leaving him with three as his remuneration for looking after the village and its common land. His power was circumscribed by law and by an efficient revenue administration. If there were any cases of oppression by the landlord (the *malguzar*) they were the exception rather than the rule. On the positive side, the *malguzar* provided in his person a Government representative of status at the village level, a man in whom the villagers had confidence, to whom they could turn in time of calamity or distress with the certainty that he would do his best for them, if only because his own interests required him to do so. Many villages had valuable forest which he safeguarded because the income from them accrued to him. If the crops failed, it was he who took loans and provided employment, his granary was opened for the hungry on credit. I have often felt that there is a communications gap between the urban rulers of India

and the rural ruled. Perhaps the decision to abolish the village intermediary sprang from this gap, in the mistaken belief that it would be popular. No minister who had spent six months in an interior village would ever have taken it. The consequences that followed were disastrous for the country as well as the Congress.

The village teak forests disappeared overnight, crores of rupees of teak melting in the flames of a stupid greed, rather like the destruction of Byzantine art when the Crusaders saw their first mural. Some of the timber was sold, much of it was burned and the thin soil on which it grew, was brought under cultivation for a couple of years, after which it refused to produce even grass. The sole custodian of Government property at village level was now the *patwari*, and it may be assumed that he did not trouble himself unduly about the destruction that was going on all round him. Even worse than the destruction of the forest was the anarchic manner in which the common land was encroached upon and brought under cultivation by those who had the strength to hold what they grabbed—at the cost of the smaller cultivator, who lost his grazing. Residential sites in the *abadi* were similarly usurped with the result that in later years the Government had to spend large amounts on acquiring new sites for the homeless.

So much for the loss to the state. But that was not the only loss. The British had alienated the old proprietors by abandoning them in their distress. The Congress made bitter enemies of the new proprietors by virtually liquidating them through the abolition of proprietary rights. Between them, the old ex-proprietors and the new ex-proprietors, constituted the most influential part of rural India. It was they who moulded village opinion, it was they who controlled the vote. The Congress had made many promises to the old proprietors, including a half promise to restore the rights which they had lost when their villages were sold. None of these promises was kept. When people saw that even the new proprietors had been liquidated, the credibility of the Congress reached an all-time low. Thus the two most influential sections of rural public opinion (the old and the new ex-proprietors) joined in a common, but as yet passive, hostility to the Congress. In many respects the wheel had come full circle, and we were back in

the atmosphere of the late thirties and early forties, an atmosphere of armed neutrality, with the people who mattered hostile or indifferent to the administration. Curiously enough, the political parties in opposition to the Congress made no effort to exploit the situation. Then, as now, there were few ideological differences between them; the differences were essentially on the question of who should exercise power. Still more curious was the Congress method of dealing with the situation. They knew perfectly well that they had lost the backbone of their organization in the rural areas, with the liquidation of the *ma'guzar*. Nevertheless, they made no serious effort to build up an alternative. Instead, they began to lean more and more on the Government servant, on the *patwari* and revenue inspector, on the police constable and the sub-inspector. Gradually, but not so gradually as to be imperceptible, the Congress machine disintegrated and they were left with the shell of what had once been the most powerful political organization in the country. No party permits the withering away of its political machine in this manner unless it is convinced that it is going to rule for ever; and overweening self confidence of this kind is not wise.

The worst consequence of using the administration as a political tool was the erosion of discipline and the quick fall in efficiency. If a Government servant relies on politics for advancement, he would be foolish to waste his energy on work; and Government servants are generally not foolish. The *patwari* realised that his M.L.A. could save him from transfer, could speak to a minister and get him promoted, could even get his punishment set aside by appealing to the state government. He ceased to waste time on the land records or the instructions of the *tehsildar*. Once, on a duck shoot, the ruler of an Indian state witnessed a superb right-and-left by his A.D.C. He cried delightedly "*Teen katal maaf*" (three murders forgiven). The doing of a favour to a politician brought with it comparable rewards. Circular orders prohibiting approach to a politician by Government servants were issued regularly, but the first person to connive at their breach was usually a minister, and nothing could be done to *him*. Some of the political interference was comical, if you have my kind of a sense of humour: There was the case of a *patwari* in one of the districts

of my division, whose transfer was ordered to be cancelled by a minister—nothing in writing, of course. The Collector concerned brought the matter to my notice, and I wrote officially to him, without any reference to the minister's orders, *directing* the transfer of the *patwari* for reasons that were stated in the letter. I endorsed a copy of the letter to the minister, and nothing further happened for the time being. Later it transpired that the *patwari* was a kind of double agent, pretending to work for the minister but actually in the pay of an opposition group. When the minister came to know of this he was full of praise for my intuition, as he called it, and I accepted the compliment gracefully. I did not think it necessary to mention that I had been quite ignorant about the *patwari's* deviousness. Nor that most of the crooked government servants were doing exactly the same thing, as a method of keeping their options open.

The main function of a government is to maintain law and order, and the maintenance of law and order inevitably entails the use of force on occasion. The Criminal Procedure Code has devoted much thought to the subject, the do's and don'ts have become crystalized, but no two situations are exactly alike, and things do go wrong sometimes. A situation is allowed to get out of control, or excessive force is used, or an error of judgement is made. The Police Manual provides for a magisterial enquiry to be held into every case of police firing, and it is always open to the Government to order an administrative enquiry into any case of a serious nature. One would think that these safeguards against human weakness are adequate, but the public began to lose faith in them. There were two reasons; a camaraderie amongst the Services which led the enquiry officer to whitewash as much as he could; and a tendency on the part of the public to hold the Government responsible for the lapses of an individual officer, which in turn made the Government reluctant to hold any officer guilty. The demand now was for a judicial enquiry, for which, strictly speaking, there is no specific provision in law. The Criminal Procedure Code provides for a magisterial inquest, and the Commissions of Enquiry Act provides for an enquiry into any matter of public importance. Such an enquiry may, but need not necessarily, be held by a member of the judiciary. What

the public wanted was an enquiry by a judge, and the Government, no longer leading but being pushed, turned to the Commissions of Enquiry Act for relief, with a judge, preferably a High Court judge, to preside. As soon as such an enquiry was ordered, there was an immediate polarization of views, all the officials on one side and the self-styled leaders on the other. The major casualty was truth. There is a story that in a certain judicial enquiry, the presiding judge grew tired of living on a diet of lies, and decided that he would himself select independent witnesses at random and examine them. He accordingly had the first passer-by intercepted and brought into court to give evidence. The man was a Muslim and the enquiry was about a communal riot. His evidence:

"I was in the Masjid saying my prayers when I heard the Hindus shouting war cries. I thought they were coming to assault us, so I ran out of the building. As soon as I got outside, a Hindu hit me on the head with a *lathi*, and I fell unconscious. That is all I know."

The next passer-by was a Hindu, and his evidence was as follows:

"I was doing my puja in the temple, when I heard the Muslims shouting *Allah ho Akbar* (victory to God). I realized they were coming to attack us, so I tried to escape. As soon as I got out of the temple, a Muslim hit me on the head with a *lathi* and I became unconscious. That is all I know."

The judge decided he would like to have the benefit of neutral opinion, and ordered a Christian to be brought in. He said:

"I was having a drink or two in the liquor shop, when I heard the Hindus yelling *har har mahadeo* from one side, and the Muslims shouting *Allah ho Akbar* from the other."

The judge pricked up his ears. Here was something like the truth at last. The witness continued:

"I came out to see what all the commotion was about. I will conceal nothing from your Lordship, I was a little under the weather, and at first I could not make out what was happening. Just then a free-for-all broke out and I was in the middle of it. A Muslim gave me a terrible blow on the head, a Hindu followed suit, and last of all a policeman poked me in the stomach with a *lathi*. That last did the trick. In an instant I was cold sober and ran home as fast as I could. That

is all I know."

There are *no* independent witnesses in a judicial enquiry. Perhaps that is why no judicial enquiry has yet resulted in serious punishment to anyone.

In the pre-1956/58 era, every report of a serious incident was analyzed by the Inspector General of Police, and, if it was important enough, by the Home Secretary and the Chief Secretary as well. Conclusions were quietly reached and defects corrected. If a lapse was found it was dealt with, but there was no fanfare of trumpets to herald the action taken. The truth came out, shyly perhaps, for truth is a naked woman in the paintings, nevertheless it came out, and that is the main thing. There was no conspiracy of defence because all concerned knew that justice would be done. It was the public insistence on finding scapegoats that drove justice and governmental objectivity underground. More important, it led to a tragic fall in the efficiency of administration. No one wanted to face a judicial enquiry with libellous cross examinations that were protected by the law. Every situation was handled "tactfully," which is to say it was not handled at all. Things were allowed to take their own course, the main objective being to avoid the use of force at all costs. It was like allowing a disease to enter a critical stage, at which time the medicine required is inevitably much more potent than what would have been needed at an earlier stage. "Tactful" handling usually ended in firing, with panic-stricken policemen shooting wildly in the belief that they were saving their lives. Then—the judicial enquiry and subsequent white-washing, or at least masterly inactivity on the report of the enquiry.

This is where you came in. No punishment to those at fault, and ultimately the maintenance of law and order in the manner to which we have now become accustomed. In other words, not at all. The maintenance of law and order is like the riding of a horse. Once you let it get out of control, it bolts, and recovery of control is a difficult process. Unfortunately, the tendency now was to let the horse have its own way in what was euphemistically called "the little things"—eve-teasing, the beating up of a harmless hotel-keeper who asked for his dues, a pitched battle between two opposing

groups on the street. I saw to it that in my division at least we never lost control of the little things, with the result that we never had any big things to control. I acquired a reputation for being "rigid," whatever that may mean, but neither I nor any of the Collectors of my division had to face a judicial enquiry. On the whole, I think the people were happy with us. Nine men out of ten are decent, law-abiding citizens, without, unfortunately, the courage to prevent others from breaking the law, or the independence to refrain from joining them when mass hysteria takes over.

I did, however, have one experience which could easily have turned into personal tragedy. My daughter—the one who had insisted on bringing her pet rooster from Khamgaon—was now a first year science student in the Government college at Jabalpur. Natural eloquence, and perhaps a modicum of natural ability, had made her the acknowledged leader of all the most troublesome girls in the college, the ones who spearheaded agitations but were tolerated because they also won prizes. A riot had occurred at a cinema and some of the boys who took part in it were arrested and prosecuted. The students, with the logic that is peculiar to students, insisted that the cinema authorities had originally been at fault, and therefore, whatever may have happened subsequently, no prosecution would be allowed to take place. The girls, led by my daughter, enthusiastically supported this *non sequiter*, there were meetings and speeches galore and the situation escalated until a showdown seemed to be inevitable. The students were adamant that there would be no trial. I decided that to give in to this preposterous demand would be to surrender law and order to the mob and was equally firm that the trial would take place. All through these developments neither my daughter nor I discussed the matter at any time. The eve of the trial came. I directed the Collector to post two companies of armed police, in addition to the ordinary police, for the protection of the court, and ordered in writing that the trial should not be allowed to be disrupted in any circumstances, even if this necessitated firing. There was no secret about these orders. Nor about the fact that it was my daughter who would lead the students to the court. Nor about the likely consequences to her of firing if it took

place.

That night, the night before the trial, I was understandably depressed. My daughter came into the drawing room where I was trying to console myself with Bismillah Khan and sat on the carpet beside my chair. She said, without preamble, "I want to hear your version of the case, not from the newspapers, from you." She has always been very close to me and there was no hesitation about my response. I told her briefly that the rights and wrongs of the riot were immaterial, what was important was the demand that there should be no trial, a demand that amounted to a claim of being above the law. I said, "Ours is an infant democracy. Once you allow any one or any group to claim freedom from the legal process—goodbye to the rule of law, goodbye to democracy. That is why I have considered the matter important enough to risk my life for."

"*Your* life?" There was a tinge of irony in her tone.

"*My* life. You don't imagine I'll continue to live if you get killed?"

She sounded thoughtful, "But your life or mine are not important, it's this rule of law thing that matters. I am beginning to see. Cheer up Daddy, there's always a silver lining if you look hard enough!"

The next day there was no march to the court, there was no demonstration, there was no attempt to disturb the proceedings, and the trial proceeded tamely enough, an anti-climax to tension that had once bordered on hysteria. I heard later—not from my daughter—what had happened. She went to college in the morning and all the girls clustered around her at once for instructions. She broke the news to them like a bomb shell—"I'm not going to lead any march." Before they could recover from the shock she went into an impassioned defence of the rule of law, of democracy and, for all I know, of woman's right to think for herself. Sheep. That is what people mostly are. The girls went to class, the boys made a half-hearted attempt to stop them and got an even stronger dose of the rule of law medicine. The lectures were not up to the mark because no teacher had come prepared, in fact several teachers had not come at all. I gave full credit to my daughter in the official report to the Government and showed

it to her before despatch. Her only comment was, "You don't think the Principal will let me off the terminal examination if you show him this?" I did not.

While I am on the subject of law and order, I might as well set down something that thirty-five years of experience has taught me. You cannot maintain law and order if you have mental reservations about your own safety, your career, the degree of force that may have to be used, or the possibility of a judicial enquiry, any more than you can hit a drive in tennis if you doubt your ability to do so. That is why the politician and many officials fail to maintain law and order. They are always in two minds about the end and the means and the consequences, quite unnecessarily so, because the issues and the procedure are both clear. You are elected or paid to maintain law and order. The law lays down how you shall go about the job. That is all there is to it. But the politicians—and some officials'—mind does not work as simply as that. During the AICC session at Raipur in 1960 a crowd of about twenty thousand rather volatile aboriginals insisted on marching to the Congress *pandal* to ventilate their grievances. I was then the Commissioner. It was quite clear that they would have to be stopped *en route* and I directed accordingly. An order under Section 144 of the Cr.P.C. was passed by the District Magistrate prohibiting processions, etc., in the neighbourhood of the *pandal* and a strong cordon was thrown around the prohibited area. My orders were that the *adivasis must* be stopped if they tried to pass into this area. Having made all the arrangements, I reported what I had done to the then Chief Minister, Dr Katju, who happened to be with Pandit Nehru at the time. I emphasized that the *adivasi* crowd would be stopped at the perimeter of the prohibited area *at all costs*. Dr Katju was startled. "What, even firing?" I said, "Even firing. It will cost fewer lives than if these people got into the *pandal*—all of them have axes." I added, rather wickedly, "Unless I am given orders to deal with the situation in some other way." Dr Katju was shocked. "But, but . . ." Panditji cut him short—"Law and order is entirely a matter for the executive to deal with at field level, you are not concerned. Leave Noronha alone, at least he's clear in his own mind."

The District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police were put in charge of the police cordon and I went into the crowd where the D.I.G., Prakash Rai, a very good friend of mine, had already preceded me. I took no police but left categorical instructions that the crowd had to be stopped at the predetermined point and if firing was necessary no one was to be deterred by the fact that the D.I.G. and Commissioner were in the crowd. At that time Rustamji (later Director General of the B.S.F.) was in charge of Panditji's security and he fortunately was and is one of my most intimate friends. I asked him to keep an eye on the arrangements and to ensure that my orders were carried out. Rustamji was too good an officer to need explanations; the situation was as clear to him as it was to me. For his ear only, I added "If there's serious trouble when we're in the crowd, I and Prakash will try to get through it to the other side, it will be impossible to return." He nodded. I followed Prakash into the crowd, found their leaders after much difficulty, and convinced them that the crowd would not reach the *pandal*. Then I played my trump card, "You want to talk to Panditji—O.K., I'll bring him to your camp in the afternoon if you give up the idea of going to the *pandal*." As soon as I said that, I knew I had won. They could not resist the lure of having Panditji's *darshan* all to themselves, and in half an hour or so they returned to their camp. I trotted back to report to Dr Katju and everyone heaved a sigh of relief. Panditji kept my word; after lunch he visited the tribal camp and his only guards were Rustamji and myself. The *adivasis* went mad, prostrating themselves and touching his feet, and for a change, Panditji, who hated servility, refrained from losing his temper. Everything passed off beautifully, although Rustamji said afterwards that throughout Panditji's visit to the camp I was fidgeting with my armpit as if I had ringworm. I had not, but I was wearing a long barrelled .38 in an armpit holster!

For the record, I may add that I have never actually had to open fire and I have dealt with my fair share of tricky situations. In 99.9 percent of cases where firing has taken place it is precisely because the authorities in charge of the situation tried desperately to avoid firing, thereby permitting

the situation to escalate until a nervous policeman let off his rifle in the belief that he was saving his life. And then of course everyone with a rifle followed suit. Under the British, we were worried about bungling, not firing; in independent India and particularly in the five years I am dealing with, we were worried about firing and not about bungling. The inevitable result was that there were far more shooting incidents after Independence than in any comparable period when we were the "slaves" of the British. It is not wise to let the means overshadow the end.

At about this time, a period of "inspired" administration was ushered in. It worked something like this: a minister told the Press (or at least his tame press men) that the Government was going to do so-and-so. *After* the disclosure, the Secretariat was ordered to examine the idea. If it was unworkable the minister pleaded at the Cabinet meeting that he had already committed himself. If he was important enough, the consequential legislation was pushed through, regardless. When the measure failed, guess who got the blame? Yes, you guessed it the first time—the soulless and red-tape-bound bureaucracy. There was only one occasion when the bureaucracy got a little of their own back—when a measure could not be enforced because it was specifically prohibited by another measure which the same ministry had passed a year earlier. Even in that case the Secretariat was at the receiving end of a rocket for not pointing out the earlier legislation. They should have done so, of course, but there are extenuating circumstances. When the *annual* output of legislation is almost equal to the *total* volume of legislation during the whole of the British period, it becomes a little difficult to keep track! This mania for legislating naturally resulted in badly drafted laws; no law secretary can produce a Bill with 247 clauses overnight unless he cuts out the thinking. When the laws enacted were very rightly ruled out as *ultra vires* of the Constitution by the High Court, the Bench had to share some of the odium formerly monopolized by the bureaucracy. Incidentally this had one welcome effect; the Bench ceased—or almost ceased—to make adverse remarks about the Executive. After some experience of the laws that were being passed, they presumably acquired a sympathetic

understanding of the difficulties of implementation.

I have referred to the ambivalence of the services in the second chapter. The politicians now became ambivalent in a curious way; they did not really want their laws to be implemented. Two examples: the grain levy on cultivators and the land ceiling. Repeatedly, government servants who tried to implement the levy—which cannot be done without a certain amount of arm twisting—suffered for it. And if you want to know how the ceiling laws were—and are being implemented, take a quick look at the number of privately owned medium and large tractors in the country. You cannot operate a 35 to 50 h.p. tractor economically unless you have at least fifty acres of double cropped land. The situation reminded me (and still does) of an incident in the petrol rationing days. The rationing officer was a realistic and reasonably honest man. His boss's habit of sending him slips with the directive to allow an extra ten gallons to A or B got on his nerves in due course. One day he went to his boss and placed a sheet of paper on his table.

"Sir, this is a list of your friends and below it is a list of mine. If I have left out any names from your list please let me know."

The boss (an Englishman) was amused.

"But what is all this about?"

"Well Sir, I thought it would save time if I prepared these two lists so that I could look after the people in them without repeated reference to or from you."

"But what about the rest of the petrol-consuming public?"

"For them, justice will be done."

By and large the post-Independence laws did justice to those who were not in any list. In course of time we got used to the new standards of implementation, but we never did get accustomed to the peculiar political habit of strategic retreats. A law was passed; the massive machinery for its enforcement was set up, thereby (I hope) reducing unemployment; but if there was sufficient opposition in the Congress Party itself, the Government gave in to the opposition and withdrew the law, or watered it down to such an extent that, for all practical purposes, it ceased to exist. Later on, when I was in the Secretariat, I rationalized my own procedures accordingly. My

scrutiny of the legislation with which I was concerned was reserved for the time *after* the Government had finally refused to withdraw it. The errors then detected could always be corrected through amendments, which is one reason why the amendments often outnumbered the original clauses. D.P. Mishra, one of the most brilliant ministers under whom I ever worked, used to be exasperated by these amendments. I soothed him with a tag from Horace, *Quod non expecte ex transverso fit*. (It is the unexpected that happens.) When the Madhya Pradesh Cabinet finally approved our latest ceiling law, I told them regretfully "It is a pity I didn't make at least one of my sons a lawyer. This law would have ensured thirty years of lucrative practice for him." The Ceiling Act was of course on a par with the other legislation in respect of quality. Although *my* son will not get any profit out of it, all the lawyers will.

"Inspired administration" implies the absence of a well-thought-out and firm policy. It is rather like the new-rich owner of a car who sits in it and tells the driver to start without mentioning any destination. The driver loses both fear and respect; and good government demands both from the Services. We reached a new low in sheer incompetence, because we had neither fear of nor respect for our masters. But they were well intentioned. They wanted to do good to the people, *if* it did not involve unpopularity with voters or political supporters. Hell is paved with good intentions.

But enough of the Services and the rulers. What about the people? As ever, they were an abiding delight, mature, cool, slightly sardonic, the very qualities that have enabled them to survive four thousand years of Services and Governments. They recognized the desire of the Government to help them, but they also recognized that this desire was linked with the need to get their votes. Their attitude became one of enlightened self interest—"Thank you, and some more please." One example will suffice to illustrate. Agricultural loans, known as *taccavi*, were liberally made available to the cultivators and they borrowed well beyond their repaying capacity. When I asked a farmer friend how he proposed to repay the substantial amounts he had borrowed, he said to me with a twinkle in his eye "What repayment?" He was

right. Apparently, the Government no longer expected repayment of the loans it gave. It was sufficient if the borrower voted for them and persuaded his friends to do likewise. Every time coercive measures were used by the revenue officers, a general stay order emanated from the Secretariat and the matter was closed. The inevitable result was that huge amounts accumulated. Equally inevitably the accounts got into an incredible mess. Today no one, including the Accountant General, knows the extent of the Government loans or the interest due on them. Periodically, machinery is set up for reconciliation, but it gets nowhere. An unfortunate consequence is that cultivators who *have* paid are again served with notices of demand and put to considerable hardship, until they are saved by the next general stay order. The people came to accept the Administration's inefficiency as a fact of life and to make allowances for it in everything they did. They were mature.

This chapter reads like an indictment. It is not meant to be one. I have tried to set down the truth as objectively as I can, for "The truth shall make ye free."

## VII. THE DACOITS

The dacoits I am writing about really did exist and so did the other characters. Names and place names have been changed, but everything narrated here actually occurred in 1956. For obvious reasons; I am not pinpointing the area where they occurred.

There were twelve of them in all, a temporary coalition of two gangs, and they walked in single file, keeping as close as they could to the bank of the *nala* that was their only guide. It was nearly full moon and there was plenty of light.

"This should be easy" said Madan Singh. He was the leader of the more important gang, a heavily built man of forty.

"The armed outpost will never suspect that we would take on a job so close to them. And the villagers—well, they are very non-violent!" He laughed silently.

The other dacoit leader was a much younger man.

"Yes, it should be easy" he said "but I hope there's going to be nothing like what happened in Mahuakhera. . . ."

Madan Singh laughed again, that characteristic silent laugh of his.

"I tell you this will be a completely peaceful affair. I'm the kindest hearted man alive, if only people do not irritate me."

Chhatar Singh, the other leader, thought of the "irritation" that had been given in Mahuakhera. A boy of twelve had panicked and screamed, and after that . . . He closed his mind to the memory.

They arrived within a furlong of the village and the voices of men gossiping after their evening meal floated upwind. A

few kerosene lamps glimmered through chinks in walls. Madan Singh halted and beckoned a follower from the group behind him. A broad squat man with enormous sloping shoulders answered the gesture. They talked briefly in whispers and then the man slipped away towards the village.

"What have you told him to do?" asked Chhatar Singh, remembering Mahuakhera.

"Nothing—absolutely nothing. He has merely gone to get our informer. You should not be so disturbed. I have already told you that this is going to be completely peaceful."

After a delay of nearly half an hour the messenger returned—he was Ghasiya the Sonr—accompanied by another man. He said, "There are six people worth looting in the village" and gave details. Madan Singh looked at the clustered huts standing out like an etching in the moonlight and thought for a minute. Then he gave his orders.

"Two men to close the road leading to Padaria. Two men to block the lane that opens on to the fields. The rest will come with me to the *chowk*: The *patel's* house is there, we'll start with him."

The dacoits looked to their weapons and moved off. The main group, under Madan Singh and Chhatar Singh, proceeded to the *patel's* house and the Sonr, who was with them, hammered on the door with the butt of his rifle. There was a sudden frightened silence inside the house. A quavering voice asked "Who is it?" Madan Singh replied smoothly "This is the police. We have received news that Madan Singh intends to raid the village tonight and we have come to guard it."

The door opened reluctantly. Before it could be slammed again the dacoits poured in. The *patel* stood frozen.

"We don't want much from you. You have a gun, we'll take that, and its ammunition. Also you should have about two thousand in cash and there are twelve *tolas* of gold in ornaments. You seem to be an intelligent man—we would like to avoid hurting you if we can. Collect everything and bring it to me. You know me I suppose—I am Madan Singh."

The *patel* went to a loft in the corner of the room and drew out a double-barreled gun. He spoke to the women in the other room and the ornaments came hesitantly from ears and noses and wrists and fingers. The money was in a hole in the

ground and that too joined the pile at Madan Singh's feet.

"Now the next house we have to visit is Baldeo's—Baldeo the Kurmi. *Patel*, you will come with us. And you might tell your people that you will die if there is any noise from here. . . ."

A woman began to sob in stifled gulps. The *patel* and the dacoits filed out of the house with the loot.

Cultivators all over the world have an affinity for the soil which amounts to worship. Amongst no community is this feeling stronger than amongst the Kurmis, the traditional cultivators, men who have made things grow for three thousand years of human history. Baldeo was a Kurmi and he had been saving ever since he could remember to buy the field adjoining his own holding. He had saved the entire price demanded by now, the whole seven hundred rupees. The seller was to accompany him to the Sub-Registrar's office in the *tehsil* town the next day, to execute the documents. Baldeo lay back on his *gadda* and savoured in anticipation the enjoyment of possessing that field; that rich and level field whose black soil was more delightful to the touch than any woman. He was a good-natured man, fond of his family and his children, and he spared a thought from his new field for them. Perhaps there would be something left over for a few trinkets, perhaps even for a piece of cloth.

The *patel's* voice broke into his thoughts, coming muffled through the door.

"Baldeo *bhayya*, open! I have some important news for you—open quickly!"

Baldeo climbed to his feet with deliberation and padded towards the door.

"Coming! I am coming! What is the news?"

He was unbarring the door as he spoke and the dacoits brushed past him when his mouth was still open. Chhatar Singh closed the door. The *patel*, shamefaced, sought obscurity behind the dacoits. It was Madan Singh who broke the silence.

"The news is this" he said, "Madan Singh and his Sonr are here . . . Ghasiya, whom you fools call my executioner. You have seven hundred rupees in cash and fifteen *tolas* of gold in ornaments. Hand over the lot and save yourself

trouble—quickly now!”

The reflexes of those who till the soil are slow. To create is always a slow process, and these are the creators, acquiring placidness from the plants they tend. Madan Singh's words did not register on Baldeo for some seconds. When they did, his mind fastened on the fifteen *tolas* of gold, subconsciously rejecting the reference to seven hundred rupees and therefore to the field.

“I don't know if there are fifteen *tolas*” he said, “but you will take whatever there is.”

Then, turning to the women who were peeping from the inner room, he said “Give him all we have.”

The women cried inaudibly as they parted with their jewels. A little pile of dully gleaming gold grew on the cloth which the Sonr had placed at Madan Singh's feet. Baldeo stood silent. To him the inevitable was not to be resisted. There was drought, and there was the rust that killed the wheat when it was giving most promise of fulfilment, and there were the dacoits who came like the locusts when there was most to ravage. All these things were inevitable. He watched, almost with indifference, as the ornaments clattered down on the cloth. When there was no more to give, Madan Singh cast an appraising eye over the spoils.

“Yes, that's about fifteen *tolas*. Now the seven hundred rupees . . . .”

Baldeo's face assumed the expression of impenetrable stupidity that is a sure sign of falsehood amongst peasants.

“Seven hundred rupees? Where would *I* get seven hundred rupees from? You have had all that we possess—now go!”

Madan Singh gestured impatiently.

“You fool . . . when we have twisted a rag around your fingers and soaked it in kerosene oil and set it on fire, you will tell us—oh, you will tell us!”

The Sonr, who had the reputation of being the least loquacious of men, surprisingly intervened.

“Wait, Maharaj. I think I can find it without his help. These cultivators are always the same. Now . . . where is the east?”

One of the dacoits pointed out the direction. The Sonr grunted “Yes, that's it. They bury their savings in the eastern corner of the main room.”

He went to the corner and found Baldeo's *gadda* spread out in it.

"They are *so* stupid, these people. Pull that *gadda* out and dig."

He was obeyed. A dacoit seized a pickaxe from the pile of tools in the room, and very soon, hardly six inches below the surface he found the pot. It was full of silver rupees. Madan Singh said "I think you ought to give a special present to my Sonr for saving you from the kerosene rag. You wouldn't think it to look at him, but he really is clever!"

The Sonr bridled with pleasure, like a dog that has been patted.

A dacoit emptied the pot of rupees on to the cloth with the rest of the ornaments and began to tie it into a bundle. What Baldeo saw, as he stood stupefied, was not a heap of rupees and a pile of jewellery, but a field, a rich black field stretching before his eyes with crops growing on it. Something happened to him then. By a curious perversion of logic his resentment was not directed against Madan Singh but against the Sonr who had been the immediate cause of discovering his hoard. He snatched up the pickaxe and drove it deep, with all his considerable strength, between the shoulders of the Sonr. Chhatar Singh fired a fraction of a second too late, after the pickaxe had done its work, but his bullet went true. Hit in the centre of the chest, Baldeo threw up his hands and crashed full length on the floor. Madan Singh dropped to his knees beside the Sonr and said "Help him someone, help him!"

Two dacoits eased the pickaxe gently out of the wound and the rush of light coloured blood that followed told its own story. There would be no more "executions" for Ghasiya. Madan Singh lifted his head on to his lap and the stoical eyes flickered briefly up at him. There was nothing that anyone could do to help.

Chhatar Singh said "He is still breathing. If we can get him quickly to a doctor perhaps he may be saved. There is no time to lose, let us go."

They placed the wounded man as gently as they could on a village cot and carried him out. No one remembered the loot lying on the floor in the bundle. No one remembered to look at Baldeo either, which was just as well, for he was still alive.

The solid 303 bullet had smacked cleanly through his body and he recovered in due course to buy his field. But we have done with him now and he passes out of the story.

Dacoits are more superstitious than the average villager because their lives depend on so many chances. The men with Madan Singh muttered amongst themselves that this was bad luck, this was the working of evil spirits. They stumbled as they carried their burden and were resentful of its weight but none dared to voice his resentment because Madan Singh stalked beside them. It took over half an hour to reach the *nala* from which they had watched the village, and they had to halt there because Ghasiya began to cough, each cough spurting blood over the litter bearers.

"He cannot be moved further" said Madan Singh. "Two of you go to Ronsara and fetch the doctor, bring him at all costs, even if you have to tie him and carry him."

He was obeyed in a grimly resentful silence. This was madness, to stop so close to the village, to send for a doctor when Ghasiya was obviously dying. But again, none dared to voice his thoughts.

There was an armed outpost two miles away, in charge of a young *naik*. He was a keen *shikari* but shooting in the danger area was strictly prohibited. He fought a losing battle against temptation for two or three months, then he acquired a .22 rifle with a telescopic sight and solved the problem. The .22 was remarkably effective on black buck and chinkara and it made very little noise. The villagers never discovered that he used to go stalking at dawn, and his own men preserved a discreet silence since they shared the meat. Today he was out with his rifle as usual, at the earliest dawn, the almost false dawn, when stars are still visible. He stalked two or three likely places without getting a shot before he came to the *nala* where the dacoits were awaiting the return of their messengers. Because he was stalking he moved silently. Because he was stalking, he also approached under cover. He had often found a black buck or a chinkara here, browsing its way back from the crops. This time there was no animal. His startled eyes fell on the dacoits, hardly fifty yards away and recognition was immediate. That was Madan Singh seated by the cot and the tall man was obviously Chhatar Singh. He withdrew behind a bush

and thought fast. There was no time to go back to his post and bring his men. Whatever had to be done, had to be done now and here and by him. He calculated his chances methodically and without excitement. If he succeeded in killing both Madan Singh and Chhatar Singh he might get away with it . . . the dacoits would certainly panic and run. He eased the safety catch off very gently and rose silently behind the bush, onto one knee. The cross hairs of the 'scope centred on the angle of Madan Singh's head, just above the ear. He squeezed the trigger.

Chhatar Singh had at last reached the stage of nervous impatience when his fear of Madan Singh became secondary to the instinct of self preservation. He said, "I do not think we should remain here any longer. Ghasiya is almost dead and nothing can save him. Let us leave him and move."

Madan Singh interrupted with a snarl.

"You can move if you want to, I will remain with my friend. You call yourself a *thakur*, you coward, you swine."

He was so angry he could not pronounce the words clearly. Again he bent over the still figure on the cot. It was at this moment that the rifle spoke. Madan Singh fell forward across the bed soundlessly. The dacoits, accustomed to heavier weapons, could not locate or identify the thin crack of the .22. They stared at Madan Singh, even Chhatar Singh stared at him. The .22 spat again spitefully. Chhatar Singh dropped to his knees, slowly on to his face, rolled over and died. Then the dacoits broke and ran, leaving three dead men behind. Ghasiya too had died at the instant when Madan Singh fell across his chest.

Baldeo the Kurmi tills his new field now. He was not in the least annoyed when the *naik* got all the rewards and the praise. The business of a farmer is to till the soil, what has to do with dacoits and killing?

## II

To the rest of India an essential feature of Madhya Pradesh is the dacoit. Every ministry that assumes office promises to do something about the problem and vast amounts are spent on the travelling allowance of policemen. When the ministry

quits, the problem is where it was. But then, even the Emperor Jehangir, who did not have to bother about fundamental rights and natural justice, regretted his inability to reform the dacoits of the Chambal, in spite of mass hangings.

There is a classical Bundela story which may shed some light on the dacoit problem, although obliquely. I offer it to future ministries in the hope that it may improve their understanding of the matter. The son of a *thakur* was sent to the village school and the school master paid special attention to him but without noticeable results; the boy was more interested in sports than in studies. At last exasperated human nature succumbed to temptation and the school master cuffed the boy soundly. But he reckoned without his host, as the saying goes. The boy ran to his house and reappeared with a sword. As his intentions were sufficiently clear, the school master took to his heels, displaying a pretty turn of speed and shouting for help. The *thakur* came out of his house and appraised the situation correctly—his son was losing the race hands down. He called out "Ho, Guruji, slow down, slow down! This is the first time the boy has had a sword in his hand with serious intent, don't disappoint him, don't break his heart!"

It is no fortuitous accident that the dacoity problem is confined to two clearly defined areas in the state—the Chambal valley comprising Bhind, Morena, Gwalior and Shivpuri districts in the north, and part of Bundelkhand, consisting of Sagar, Damoh and Chhatarpur districts in the north-east. The two areas have nothing in common geographically or economically. The Chambal valley is irrigated and rich; Bundelkhand is arid, stony, and poor. But both areas are on the main invasion route from the north to the south, the route trod by countless lakhs of soldiers, Aryans and Scythians and Moguls, free men and slaves, highborn princes and adventurous mercenaries on their way to becoming princes. There were many in these armies who were allergic to authority and discipline, who deserted on the provocation of a chance word or a chance blow, the psychological rebels. They settled in the area, intermarried with the locals, were reinforced continually by fresh deserters from succeeding waves of invasion. Resistance to authority and a quick reckless temper were bequeathed to them by their ancestors and reinforced by the blood of later

collaterals until at last a new breed was stabilized, the characteristic breed of the dacoit, the hereditary rebel. It is not for nothing that they call themselves *bagi* or rebel.

That then is the explanation of the dacoit. It is nonsense to blame his existence on economic conditions, for many parts of the state are much poorer and yet free of the scourge. It is equally nonsense to ascribe the problem to corrupt and incompetent administration—slow disposal of revenue cases with bribery playing a major part in the decision—because the administration in these areas is not noticeably worse than elsewhere. The simple fact is that heredity and environment have combined to produce a distinctive type of man, who is a law unto himself and recognizes no other law, quick to anger and quick to strike, slow to forget or forgive, taking pride in his ability to survive in the midst of hostile conditions—the dacoit. He is admired precisely because of these qualities, even to the extent of welcoming an opportunity for him to sire a child in an otherwise impeccable family. But because of these qualities there are inherent contradictions in his character—kindness and ruthless cruelty, faith and treachery, generosity and meanness, heroism and cowardice. In a sense, he is not only a rebel against society and the law, he is a rebel against himself.

There are three main reasons why he is a dacoit. Firstly it is the only way in which he can be a law unto himself. Secondly it gives him power and the respect of others, which no other vocation would give. Thirdly it is profitable. And there are three main reasons why dacoity in the Chambal and Bundelkhand areas cannot be eradicated. 1) For every dacoit liquidated, another comes into being, 2) the respect paid to the dacoits ensures that they are always like fish in a friendly sea or like a guerilla amidst a friendly population, and 3) the police prefer to take a cut in the profits rather than to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. So there you have it. Dacoity is like amoebic dysentery; there is really no cure, there are only palliatives, remedial measures that make the disease more tolerable. When I first joined the Service, villagers were bullied into forming defence squads which patrolled the area. Thirty-five years later, when I retired, the same old defence squads, slightly better armed, were still going out on the same half-hearted patrols. The trouble is that the section vulnerable

to dacoits—the better-off people—are too scared and too weak to join the patrols, and the rest of the population see no reason why they should risk their necks to protect the *Sethji* or the rich farmer, having themselves, nothing to lose. The only ray of hope is the increasing fondness of the younger generation for *la dolce vita*. When they are sufficiently corrupted by the silks of civilization they will be too soft to become dacoits.

During my tenure as Commissioner, Jabalpur—1956 to 1958—I was ordered to ensure that the dacoits were cut down to size. The only way to do it was to participate in the operations myself so that senior officers of the police and revenue departments would do likewise, instead of directing from a safe rear. More than a hundred dacoits were killed and at least double that number arrested. The palliatives made the disease bearable and most of the people who had fled their villages in fear of the dacoits, trickled back. Much later, in 1970 and 1971 when I was President of the Board of Revenue in Gwalior, I established more human relations not exactly with the dacoits, but their families. There is excellent fishing and in winter, some very tolerable duck-and-geese shooting in the region. I used to wander off on Sundays with a rod or a gun after I discovered that High Court judges and members of the Board of Revenue were safe from the gangs; the former because they dealt with criminal appeals and revisions, and the latter because they had the final say in revenue cases involving land disputes. That is how I came to know Madho Singh's uncle, and Mohar Singh's nephew and Nathu Singh's brother, hospitable and sporting chaps, all of them. And many others. That is also how I gained some unofficial insight into the real reasons for the big surrender to Jayaprakash Narayan and the Sarvodaya workers.

The most intelligent of the Big Three was Madho Singh. He had invested a very large amount in three rice mills in Bhind district but unfortunately the police invariably mounted full-scale anti-dacoity operations in November, December and January, just when the milling season was at its height and his supervision was most needed. As a result he began to lose heavily on his mills.

Mohar Singh was the most dangerous and the most powerful of the gang leaders. A total reward of about five lakhs of rupees

was announced for his death or arrest; and five lakhs is a lot of money. He took to slipping away from his gang and sleeping alone in secret places at night because any member could be a potential traitor with the weight of five lakhs dragging down his fidelity. Then sleep would not come, each rustle of a branch became the killer's step, the night was populated with ghosts that whispered of death. To make bad matters worse, he began to have ill luck in his encounters with the police and lost a number of men. In a word, he reached the end of his tether.

The most human story is that of Nathu Singh. He met a graduate school teacher in Bina-Etawah, fell in love with her and got married. She was in love with him too, and her constant refrain of "I don't want to be a widow" resulted in his ceasing all professional activity and virtually retiring from the life of a dacoit. But she harped on the idea of surrender because surrender would ensure his life . . . .

That is the background. The rest is well-known, Madho Singh's meeting with J.P., the convincing of Mohar Singh and Nathu Singh, and finally the mass surrenders, not only in the Chambal valley but in Bundelkhand as well. A movement of this kind snowballs, like mass *satyagraha*. When the big names surrender they ensure that all the existing dacoits do likewise; they have no intention of leaving their relations and friends to the tender mercies of lesser fry. And the future? I quote Madho Singh's uncle, "Now the *patwari* will become the Collector" by which he meant that the retirement of the big names had left the field open for all the new entrants. If he is right, J.P.'s remedy may turn out to be worse than the disease.

## VIII. "AYARAM, GAYARAM"

I returned to the Secretariat in 1961 after a lapse of twelve years, in the capacity of Additional Chief Secretary. The Boss (H.S. Kamath) was now the Chief Secretary and, as I might have expected, he kept my head well up to the bit. There was a lot of work to be done in connection with the integration of the services of the four states that had merged in 1956—the former Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal. Towards the end of 1961 I went off to participate in the takeover of Goa as the first Chief Civil Administrator and returned after restoring normal administration and framing the basis for a development plan. I enjoyed working under the Military Governor, Major General Candeth, and the whole thing took hardly three months. He wrote me a rather nice letter after my return:

My dear Ron,

I regret that I have not written to you earlier to thank you for the work that you have done here as Chief Civil Administrator. I realize fully well the great responsibility that was thrust upon you and that the amount of work that had to be done, especially in the earlier days, was prodigious.

I have learnt a great deal through my association with you and I hope you, in turn, enjoyed your stay here. May I thank you for every thing you have done for me and Goa and especially for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,  
Sd. Unni Candeth.

Then I was back at my real job, Services, Home Department, and second in command to the Boss. When he retired in 1963, I succeeded him as Chief Secretary. Mandloi was the Chief Minister, but shortly afterwards, D.P. Mishra took his place. The first period of Mishraji's stewardship ended with the elections of 1967. It was chiefly notable for a restoration of the norms of law and order and a return to the firmness of administration which we had lost in 1957 when Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla died. There is nothing to highlight because there are no highlights in an efficient administration. Then came the General Elections of 1967 and with it the era of *Ayaram* and *Gayaram*.

The honest politician is one who, having been bought, stays bought. When he ceases to remain bought and sells himself again, he is called a political defector. The technique of political defection was invented by the Congress, but initially, and in keeping with their greater political experience, they used it to strengthen an existing majority, not to convert a minority into a majority. Accordingly, no one sat up and took notice. It began with constituencies where the Congress candidate lost to an Independent. When this happened, it was accepted as proof that the Independent was fit to be a Congressman, and he was persuaded to become one. Then came the years of slender majorities when party members realized the importance of a single vote—theirs, naturally—and insisted on exercising a quite disproportionate influence on party policies. To counteract such people, members from the opposition were won over and some of them rewarded with the cakes and ale of office, which in turn set the more disciplined party members to thinking that if a sufficient number of them got together they could topple the ruling group and when a new government was formed—who knows, merit might be rewarded. Such toppling was confined to the party, and was done with the covert blessings of the High Command (the Congress Working Committee); that is to say, the new government was still a Congress government. The very first Congress government in what was then the Central Provinces and Berar saw an early example of this kind of power politics when Dr N.B. Khare, the Chief Minister, tried to get rid of Ravi Shankar Shukla and D.P. Mishra by tendering his resignation to the

Governor. He expected that this would lead to the dissolution of the ministry and to his being invited to form a new ministry, as the Congress was indisputably the majority party and he was its leader in the Legislature. Instead, the High Command sacked him and Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla became the Chief Minister. It has always seemed to me that Dr Khare beat Charan Singh (the first *Gayaram*) to the starting post in the matter of defection—but within the party as it were. After all, Dr Khare made his move in July 1938!

After Independence the first Congress ministries in the Centre as well as the states were monolithic in their massive power, the power of steam roller majorities; no question of defection *from* the party could arise, and defection *to* the party was, from the Congress view point, unnecessary. But the opposition began to grow in the sixties. The Congress majority, was still there, only now it was a slender and uneasy majority, a majority torn by internecine strife, the cubs in the wolf pack had grown up and were snarling at the heels of the leader, whoever he might be. One would have expected the leadership to read the writing on the wall, to close their ranks and unite. Instead they continued to make up for the doubtful loyalty of some of their followers by purchasing the more doubtful loyalty of some of their opponents. The Congress strength after the election of 1962 increased in every state by tens and twenties within a month or two. Sometimes they started without an overall majority, but in a matter of weeks a little robust horse trading put them well ahead of the combined opposition. Madhya Pradesh reflected accurately what was happening in the whole country. After the general election of 1957, the Congress held 232 seats in a house of 288. They refrained from further depleting the opposition strength of 56. But in the election of 1962 poor old Dr Katju not only lost his own seat, Congress narrowly missed a trip to the wilderness. They got less than half the total number of seats, 141 out of 289. But the Governor asked them to form a government. They did so under B.A. Mandloi in May—and so, by July they had a comfortable majority, 176 out of 282 seats then filled! For the Congress, it was the day of the *Ayarams*. Then came the general elections of 1967. In March 1967 Congress had 167 seats in a House of 296; God was in His Heaven and all was right

with the world except for Govind Narayan Singh (and Charan Singh in U.P.). By November the Congress share had lumped to 125 and the Treasury benches were occupied by an S.V.D. government for twenty uneasy but amusing months. It was the day of the *Gayarams*. In May 1969, Congress was back in power—without an election. They had acquired 169 seats through methods which they had originally invented but which had been considerably improved by a little borrowing of ideas from the S.V.D. Shyama Charan Shukla became the Chief Minister and when he was moved out by the High Command in January 1972 to make way for P.C. Sethi, he had 191 more or less faithful Congressmen behind the Government. The *Gayarams* had returned. The general election of 1972 coasted along on an Indira wave. Congress romped home with 220 seats out of 297 but even this left them dissatisfied; by September 1974, they had eight more *Ayarams*.

And here is a U.N.I. message dated 14 May 1975 from Haryana, the original home of the *Ayaram-Gayaram* clan, “In a dramatic move Haryana Chief Minister Bansi Lal, who is currently holidaying in Simla, today announced admission of nine Independent legislators into the Congress, swelling the party strength to more than three-fourths of the total membership of the House.”

Political defection is caused, at the party level, by the ruling party's need—real or fancied to gain more support. It is significant that the vast majority of defections are *to* and not *from* the ruling party. It is they who have the cakes and ale in their gift. When defections take place *from* the ruling party, the real motive is invariably to trade a position of insignificance for one of power. That kind of defection cannot be individual, it has to be on a scale large enough to topple the government, although, of course, it is always started by an individual. Defectors of this type are persons who have no hope of leading a ~~successful~~ rebellion within the party; to be successful they must join hands with an opposition party; in order to defeat the leader of their party, they have to defeat the party itself. Now let us return to Madhya Pradesh in October 1967.

D.P. Mishra was the Chief Minister, a man I would bracket with the *Sardar* in quality of leadership. He had been second

in command to Ravi Shankar Shukla, then there was a disagreement with Jawaharlal and suddenly he quit the Congress. He returned after twelve years in the wilderness, found favour with Indira Gandhi—some said he was later her chief adviser in the strategy she followed when Kamraj was “kam-rajed”—and won the leadership of the party by a decisive majority. He stood like a colossus in the ranks of state leadership, possibly national leadership, and there was no cloud in his sky except a little cloud, no bigger than a man’s hand, as the saying goes, certainly not a cloud that presaged storms. Its name was Govind Narain Singh, the son of Capt. Avdhesh Pratap Singh who had created the Congress organization in Rewa, the biggest princely state of Vindhya Pradesh. Govind Narain Singh was a born-and-brought-up Congressman; he probably teathed on the *Harijan* and must have been weaned on Mahatmaji’s post-prayer discourses. In later years father and son went to jail together during the ’42 movement. He was a hereditary Congressman, a Congressman by religion as it were. Given a million guesses, I would never have picked him as the man to upset the Congress applecart. He played a leading role in D.P. Mishra’s return to power, mobilizing the Madhya Bharat and Vindhya Pradesh vote for him, and joined the Council of Ministers in the first period of Mishraji’s Chief Ministership. Then things began to go sour. He was, as the Emperor Jehangir said of India, “a high spirited horse that needs a good rider.” A good rider does not resent high spiritedness in a horse (or a man) but Mishraji misread the high spiritedness for incipient revolt and reacted accordingly. If the roles had been reversed and Govind Narain Singh had been in his place, a frank talk with a few unliterary words interspersed would have cleared the air once and for all. But Mishraji was not Govind Narain Singh. Secret enquiries were made on a variety of charges and they were secret only in name. Any person of normal sensitiveness would have resented the action taken, particularly if he was a minister. Ultimately, when Mishraji came back for his second term in 1967, Govind Narain Singh was dropped from the Council of Ministers. He bided his time, a hunter waiting for the tiger to come to a kill. Incidentally, he happens to be a *shikari* of note.

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. If Mishraji did not

scorn the Rajmata of Gwalior, at least his procedures justified her belief that he did so. The Congress candidates for the 1967 election from the former Gwalior state were selected without consulting her and even her suggestion for a discussion on the subject was brusquely rejected. Considering that the only chance for Congress candidates to win in that area was through the support of the House of Scindia, her suggestion was not unreasonable. But the candidates were selected on the advice of Gautam Sharma, a minister from Gwalior and a sworn enemy of the Rajmata. The situation was so full of tension that something had to break. The Rajmata's patience did; she resigned from the Congress, set up her own candidates in the whole Gwalior area and made a clean sweep at the 1967 polls. Every single one of her candidates was elected and most of the Congress candidates including Gautam Sharma lost their deposits.

Mishraji's stand was that feudalism could never be defeated in alliance with the former rulers who, by definition, represented feudalism. He may have been right; but in Vindhya Pradesh he went out of his way to get the support of the former ruler of Rewa and that was about the only reason why Congress won. In Gwalior they ended up without a single seat. As a penalty bonus they acquired fifty-five dedicated opponents all belonging body and soul to the Rajmata, and constituting a phalanx that could be thrown into battle at her single command. Even at this stage a rapprochement could have been arranged because the Rajmata was not personally interested in State politics. She had also won a Lok Sabha seat and the indications were that she would sit in Parliament, resigning her membership of state assembly. Gautam Sharma saw to it that this did not happen. Mishraji was persuaded to make a sarcastic statement inviting—or challenging—her to take the seat she had won in the Assembly. That burnt all the bridges. She resigned her Parliament seat and took her place in the Vidhan Sabha.

Napoleon once said that a good military machine is not alone enough to ensure victory. Also needed are time, place and opportunity. Govind Narain Singh now had the first two and he was patient enough to wait for the third. Mishraji handed it to him on a platter. He provided Madhya Pradesh

with a clean, firm and dynamic administration which involved a drastic cut in the influence of the M.L.As. You can't have a clean, firm and dynamic administration if government servants do the bidding of the politicians and not justice, except when the bidding of the politicians happens to coincide with justice. The people were happy; but then the people do not make or unmake governments, they only make M.L.As and it is the M.L.As who do the rest. The peoples mandate runs for a couple of months, until the elections are over; thereafter the M.L.As take charge and continue for five years. With luck, that is. Mishraji irritated the M.L.As *and* the ministers (or most of them) *and* the waiting list of aspirants for both offices, on two main counts; because he was right and he knew it; and because they were wrong and he took pains to let them know it. Being right and letting people know they are wrong; I cannot think of a more effective prescription for trouble.

Mishraji became Chief Minister in March 1967. By July the undercurrent of hostility towards him had assumed the dimensions of a Gulf Stream. He was aware of it. But he sat back defiantly and dared the snarling cubs to do their worst. Even when life-long Congressmen like Dr Rai resigned he took no steps to win them back although the merest sign of a conciliatory gesture would have sufficed. Wiser now in retrospect, I think he wanted to teach the party a lesson; that indiscipline does not pay. He knew that his opponents had no chance of displacing him from the leadership of the CLP and he had already made up his mind what to do if defection to the opposition toppled his government, he would ask for the dissolution of the Legislature and for fresh elections. The Law Ministry had advised Indira Gandhi that this was possible even if the demand for dissolution was from a Chief Minister who had lost his majority. She made at least two widely publicized statements just before the debacle, hinting broadly at dissolution if the M.P. Government fell. The second and last of these statements came exactly twenty-four hours before the actual mass defection. Secure in the knowledge of her support, Mishraji adopted a policy of masterly inactivity.

Govind Narain Singh did not. At about this time his father died and the last obstacle to his openly fighting the Congress vanished. Father and son were very close to each other. If

*Kaptan Sahib*, as Avdhesh Pratap Singh was fondly known, had lived, I am quite sure Govind Narain Singh would have been irresistably restrained from leaving the Congress, let alone fighting it. But he died. Govind Narain Singh returned from the funeral, lost and embittered. To a friend he remarked, "I have just returned from my father's *kriya karm* (obsequies), now I must set about those of Uncle (D.P. Mishra)." He threw himself into the battle with inexhaustible energy and determination. Throughout the blazing summer and the soaking monsoon he raced the length and breadth of Madhya Pradesh, personally contacting every disgruntled M.L.A., selling his plan for revolt to them and to the Rajmata, to the Jana Sangh and to the Socialist Party (they had seven seats!) to everyone, however insignificant, who might possibly join in the fight against Mishraji. Mishraji knew; but he played bridge in Pachmarhi and thought about administrative matters. Gradually Govind Narain Singh welded his dissonant team into—well, not a homogeneous body, but at least a mob heading in the same general direction. Once I hinted at the situation to Mishraji. He smiled, "I listen to your advice on administrative matters; leave the politics to me!" and I was content to do so.

The Vidhan Sabha convened soon after the rains to pass the Budget, as we had taken only a Vote on Account immediately after the elections. Rumours were persistent about mass defection and the impending fall of the Government and then I suddenly got information that D-day was tomorrow and that the Deputy Speaker, Narbada Prasad Shrivastava, would be one of the defectors. I passed on the information to Mishraji; he disbelieved the latter part but was persuaded to ensure that the Speaker (K.P. Pande) and not Shrivastava would be in the Chair on the morrow. The question hour passed off with unaccustomed ease because the opposition was eager to proceed to the showdown. Then events moved with lightning speed. Govind Narain Singh and twenty-nine others got up and crossed the floor. The defectors included Narbada Prasad Shrivastava, and Dharampal Singh Gupta, the Chief Whip of the Congress Legislature Party. Mishraji immediately sent a slip to the Speaker asking for the House to be adjourned until the next day. If Shrivastava had been in the Chair as originally planned, the request would have been disallowed, but

Pande rightly granted it. There was pandemonium for a while. At last the House adjourned. Then came hectic consultations with Delhi and with party members. Ultimately the Governor was asked to adjourn the House *sine die* and, somewhat to my surprise, he did so. The referee was on the side of the champ, as he usually is. Years later, in similar circumstances, a governor sacked a perfectly legitimate government (non-Congress) in Bengal for not convening the House immediately to test its majority. The fact that the House was to meet in a week's time according to the existing programme cut no ice with him. Here, however, we got our adjournment without difficulty.

Govind Narain Singh whisked his *Gayarams* off to Delhi, at the Rajmata's expense, to keep them safe, but he might as well have saved himself the trouble. Mishraji would have nothing to do with them. He did try to win over the Socialists and the splinter groups in the Opposition who were supporting Govind Narain Singh but *they* would have nothing to do with *him*. Ultimately the House was summoned. One day before it met the Prime Minister again hinted at dissolution and Mishraji was confident that it would come. He asked my opinion and I said that a chief minister who had already lost his majority, was to all intents and purposes no longer a chief minister and could not therefore avail himself of the constitutional provision under which he could ask for fresh elections; that was the privilege of the chief minister with a majority. He did not agree with me. Neither did the Law Secretary.

The night before the House met Mishraji belatedly decided to contact the defectors. As soon as Govind Narain Singh came to know of this he shepherded his flock to the residence of the Speaker and sought his protection, alleging that efforts were being made to kidnap his supporters. He wanted to spend the night on the Speaker's lawn and was permitted to do so with his followers. They slept peacefully while he rode herd over them, equipped with a lovely little 275 Rigby. But no one tested its accuracy by making an attempt to kidnap any of his charges.

The next day the House met. The Education grant was put to the vote and the Government lost. The Speaker adjourned for twenty-four hours and Mishraji got on the phone

to Kamraj. Once, twice, thrice. We wondered what was happening and found out at last that there had been a complete *volte face* at Delhi. Now they directed Mishraji to resign. Bitter and disillusioned, he did so at midnight. Of all the dirty tricks a party can perpetrate on one of its leaders, this was the dirtiest. If they had given him the least inkling that there would be no dissolution he would have played Govind Narain Singh's own game and, I am quite sure, beaten him at it. As Punjab and Haryana proved, a defector is like a drop of mercury, running with the tilt of the container. Govind Narain Singh's men were no exception to the rule. But the attitude of the High Command had convinced Mishraji that they were bent on making an example of defectors and he played along with them loyally. To this day I am not sure why the High Command changed its attitude but I suspect that at about this time they were trying to do to Charan Singh in U.P. what Charan Singh had already done to them, and U.P. was more important than Madhya Pradesh. Or a principle.

In parenthesis, and for the benefit of chief ministers afflicted with *Gayarams*, it may be noted that the Centre has now finally accepted the view I had propounded to Mishraji, namely that a dissolution can only be demanded *before* the Leader of the House has lost his majority. Once his government has been out-voted he has no rights or powers greater than those of an individual legislator. I have not, however, known of any chief minister admitting even to himself that he has lost his majority, until his government is actually defeated—in spite of Mishraji's experience.

Govind Narain Singh called his coalition the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal, literally, the United Legislature Party or S.V.D. for short. They did not wait for Mishraji's resignation. As soon as the Government had been defeated they and all the opposition parties (the Jana Sangh, the Rajmata's group, the Socialists) went in procession on foot to Raj Bhavan, presumably so that heads could be counted, and demanded that they be invited to form a government. The invitation came the next day, giving plenty of time for the entire administrative machinery to wonder what would happen to them. They had seen chief ministers change but never the government. It was rather like the Viet Cong taking over from Thieu or the Indian

government taking over from the Portuguese in Goa. The Secretariat corridors were full until I came out and emptied them with a few well-chosen words. For myself, I was too busy to worry; and in any case I never worry about things which are outside my control.

The Rajmata refused to lead the new government or even to join it. Instead, a Coordination Committee of the constituent parties was formed, over which she presided, a kind of super government, with limitations. It could not, for obvious reasons, be in day to day touch with the administration, and in the end it came to occupy much the same position as the All India Congress Committee vis-à-vis the Congress Government of India. Its main utility lay in ironing out differences—and there were many—between the various parties in the S.V.D. The government itself was a motley crew, ranging from men of undoubted ability like Govind Narain Singh and Saklecha (the Jana Sangh leader) at one end, to a minister whose charge for ordering the transfer of a peon was ten rupees at the other. The more stupid the minister, the greater was his nuisance value; he had only to threaten resignation to get his own way, for one resignation would have split the S.V.D. at the seams. The only two unifying influences were Govind Narain Singh and the Rajmata, each in a different way. Govind Narain Singh did it through the amazing gift he had of persuasion; he could bring almost anyone round to his point of view if he so desired. The Rajmata achieved the same object by agreeing to every demand of every group and acting as the spearhead of all the (often conflicting) demands. She could afford to do so because her position gave her power without responsibility; if things went wrong the baby was always in the Chief Minister's lap. The Official Secrets Act made dealing with the Coordination Committee a little complicated. Govind Narain Singh conceded my request that no Government official be present at their meetings as it would have been difficult to refuse classified information to a Committee which included the Chief Minister. We, however, remained available offstage for consultations with him when required, and the *modus vivendi* worked. What did not work so well was the desire of the Coordination Committee that I should implement their decisions directly and not on orders from the Chief Minister. I declined to do so and

Govind Narain Singh supported me. Then the Committee began to dub me "Mishra's man." Again Govind Narain Singh came to the rescue, remarking dryly that every Chief Secretary was by definition the Chief Minister's man, so that now I was *his* man. But the Coordination Committee never did like me; and I was quite incapable of liking them. By and large they were a set of unprincipled amateurs.

For that matter, the S.V.D. government was itself an amateur government actuated mainly by the desire to be different from the Congress government that had gone before. Since all governments have an underlying common purpose—to govern—and since the procedures of governing have been finalized after centuries of trial and error, radical changes are only possible at the cost of efficiency. In their desire for speed, the S.V.D. took quick decisions and equally quick counter-decisions. For example, orders, particularly transfer orders, were issued and cancelled with bewildering rapidity. I suggested at a Cabinet meeting that we should ask the Centre to provide two express trains for Madhya Pradesh, north to south and east to west, both equipped with wireless. I explained that these trains would expedite the movement of officials on transfer.

"But why the wireless?" asked Govind Narain Singh, amusedly.

"For quick transmission of cancellation orders, Sir."

D.P. Mishra had been strict about transfers which were made only on administrative grounds, so of course the S.V.D. had to order them freely and on no grounds, unless the recommendation of a political worker is a ground. D.P. Mishra had abolished land revenue on uneconomic holdings, so the S.V.D. had to abolish it on economic holdings as well. D.P. Mishra had always protected the Services when they acted in execution of their duties, so the S.V.D. had to suspend an I.P.S. superintendent because he arrested some Jana Sangh workers during a communal riot. Things would have been much worse but for Govind Narain Singh. He cajoled, persuaded, threatened resignation, to salvage the bare essentials of administration. If it had not been for him the S.V.D. government would have collapsed in three months under the weight of its own incompetence. But even he had to give in to

*force majeure* on occasion. One of the ministers made a proposal which was, on the face of it, administratively improper. Govind Narain Singh marked the file to me for examination and I opposed the suggestion vigorously. He then wrote (in Hindi) "I entirely agree with what the Chief Secretary has said but, for political reasons, I accept the proposal of the Minister." And that was that.

As time passed I noticed a peculiar thing about Govind Narain Singh. He had toppled a Congress government but he was still a Congressman at heart. Some inner compulsion made him protect Congress interests at every turn. The Jana Sangh wanted to have Education but he fobbed them off with Home, reasoning—correctly I think—that they could build up a permanent following through the primary schools whereas the police would follow them only so long as they were in power. Again and again I saw him aligning himself with Congress indirectly by elbowing out the Jana Sangh who were their main rivals; neither the Socialists nor the defectors nor the Rajmata group counted for much. It was as if he had killed the thing he loved and was trying to bring it back to life.

The communal situation, contrary to expectations, did not deteriorate. The Jana Sangh who were responsible for law and order, held their followers in check, and the Muslims realized that they would get short shrift if they started trouble. It was as it had been in the princely states when they existed. Everyone knew who was the top dog and the top dog knew that he had to keep the peace. If, to the Jana Sangh, the Muslims were foreigners, at least they ensured a modicum of safety for them. But great care was taken to see that no key post in any department went to a Muslim.

My own position was not an easy one, trying to prevent the ministers from behaving as if today was their last day on earth, the only day and the only sunshine in which to make hay. There had been little corruption in Mishraji's regime; now the lesser fry made corruption a way of life and Govind Narain Singh could not stop them. All I could do was to make it a little, a very little, more difficult. In his capacity as Chief Coordinator in the ministry he ensured that all controversial—which means money-spinning—files went to him through me, and I ensured that he had the benefit of an honest man's opinion.

The result was that gradually I became public enemy number one to the more venal ministers, who took care to enlist the Rajmata on their side. It was I and not the Congress who constituted the opposition. At one Cabinet meeting a minister whose proposals I had opposed said, sourly, "You don't seem anxious to continue as Chief Secretary, Noronha, or else you would not go on in this way."

I said, with as much respect as I could muster "Sir, my real desire is to become a *tehsildar*, but unfortunately you'll have to give me the salary of the post in which I'm confirmed, a Commissioner's pay." Again, and for the umpteenth time, Govind Narain Singh smoothed over an awkward situation.

When the Class III and IV employees of Madhya Pradesh went on strike he asked for my reading of the situation. I told him that in my experience of such affairs the greatest difficulty was the desire of individual ministers to gain popularity by arriving at a compromise with the strikers, a desire that inevitably encouraged and prolonged the strike. Once the Government had reached a final conclusion, the battle should be fought out to the bitter end with no question of a negotiated peace. He said, "That's what I thought. I'm pushing off on a *shikar* trip. Only you will know where I am. Send a wireless van with me and tell me when the strike is over. You will be in sole charge during my absence."

And that is how it was. The strike lasted for exactly seven days, after which it was called off unconditionally. When he heard the news over the radio that night he sent me a laconic wireless. "Congratulations. Request permission to return."

I served the S.V.D. for a little over a year and by that time Govind Narain Singh and I were both getting a little tired of them. A coalition government without a minimum common ideology and united only in a common hatred of the Congress is torn apart by its own compulsions. It is not a satisfying government to serve or to lead. When, therefore, I was asked late in 1968 to go to Punjab on deputation as Adviser to the Governor I gladly agreed. The send-off I got from government servants of all ranks was terrific; it surprised me, coming so soon after the strike I had broken, but it surprised the S.V.D. even more. As a farewell present Govind Narain Singh wrote me the following letter—

My dear Noronha,

On the eve of your departure for Punjab to take up your new assignment as Adviser to the Governor, I write to congratulate you on being selected for this very important post specially in view of the critical situation which Punjab is facing politically and as a border State. I am sure you will handle your new duties with the same efficiency and sincerity that you have always displayed in whatever duty was assigned to you.

At the same time I want to thank you for the outstanding work you have done during your tenure under me. At all times I could rely on you for a frank and honest opinion, untainted by any political slant; and even when I over-ruled you, I could still rely on you to carry out my decision loyally, faithfully, and competently. You are one of those very few in the administrative services whom I admire and respect for their intelligence and integrity. I am directing that a copy of this letter be placed on your C.P.F.

With kind regards;

Yours sincerely,  
Sd. G.N Singh

Virtue may not always be its own reward but it has compensations.

## IX. PUNJAB INTERLUDE

Article 356 of the Constitution makes provision for circumstances in which the administration of a State cannot be carried on by a duly elected government, as for example, when *Ayarams* and *Gayarams* change from one side to the other with so much rapidity as to make a stable government impossible. That is exactly what had happened in Punjab, and the President—in practice, the Government of India—had accordingly issued a proclamation taking over the government of the state. As is usual in such cases the new government was the Governor and two Advisers, Gyan Singh Kahlon who had once been Chief Secretary, and myself.

Lachman Singh Gill was the last Chief Minister of Punjab before it came under President's rule in 1968 but the last real Chief Minister was Pratap Singh Kairon, founder and builder of the new Punjab. The men who came after him were pure anticlimax, midgets grotesquely perched on the seventeen hands stallion which is Punjab. Punjab ignored them and went about its business, prosperity increased, and production in all spheres, particularly the agricultural, rocketed. Unfortunately the midgets had a free hand with administration (the people could hardly help here) and by the time I arrived the services had been ground down to bedrock. The Punjab services are second to none in the country but a succession of ferocious and idiotic Tipu Sultans had reduced them to the level of a sullen, dispirited, demoralized mob by the simple process of hounding them until they said "yes" to everything. Not Kairon. He was big enough to know the value of a good sword which is

a good officer.

Article 311 of the Constitution is supposed to be the safeguard of the Civil Services. Let us have a look at it.

“(1) No person who is a member of a Civil Service of the Union or an all-India Service or a Civil Service of a State or holds a civil post under the Union or a State shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed.

“(2) No such person as aforesaid shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an enquiry in which he has been informed of the charges against him and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges, and where it is proposed, after such enquiry, to impose on him any such penalty, until he has been given a reasonable opportunity of making representation on the penalty proposed, but only on the basis of the evidence adduced during such enquiry:

Provided that this clause shall not apply

- (a) where a person has been dismissed or removed or reduced in rank on the ground of conduct which has led to his conviction on a criminal charge; or
- (b) where the authority empowered to dismiss or remove a person or to reduce him in rank is satisfied that for some reason, to be recorded by that authority in writing, it is not reasonably practicable to hold such enquiry; or
- (c) where the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied that in the interest of the security of the State it is not expedient to hold such enquiry.

“(3) If, in respect of any such person as aforesaid, a question arises whether it is reasonably practicable to hold such enquiry as is referred to in clause (2), the decision thereon of the authority empowered to dismiss or remove such person or to reduce him in rank shall be final.”

The main criticism of Article 311 has always been that it gives too much protection to the corrupt and/or incompetent Government servant. It does nothing of the sort. Surely the right to a fair trial, which is all that clause (2) confers, is not

a barrier against justice! In my experience the only cases where Article 311 has been invoked by the High Court to set aside a dismissal are cases where the disciplinary authority did not bother to, or was too ignorant to follow, the correct procedure. The real protection of venal Government servants has invariably been the politician. My own criticism of Article 311, based largely on what I saw in Punjab, is that it does not adequately protect the honest and independent Government servant. Suspension under the service rules is not deemed to be a punishment, isn't it? I have seen Government servants under suspension for as long as five years in Punjab with no charges as yet framed against them. During this period they were automatically reverted from the post they were holding to a lower post, if, as was usually the case, they were not confirmed in the post they were holding. That meant a minimum drop in pay, of 25 to 30 per cent. But they did not get even this lesser amount; all they got was one-third of it, which is what the rules allow. Try living on one-third of 75 per cent of your salary for years on end, with a houseful to support and then tell me that suspension is not a punishment! In Punjab a few long suspensions soon brought the civil service into line.

In parenthesis, constitutional safeguards are no protection if the Government is determined to act in bad faith. The Constitution itself can be amended, as has happened in the case of Article 314 which was supposed to protect the I.C.S., and Article 362 which dealt with the rights and privileges of Indian Rulers; or it can be bypassed. In the case of Article 314 I said, at the time when it was on the anvil, that a simple contract, rather like the covenant executed with the Secretary of State for India, and enforceable in a civil court, would have more teeth in it than the proposed Article 314. I said exactly the same thing in respect of Article 362 to one of the Eastern States Agency rulers who was a friend of mine. But in both cases majority opinion preferred to rely on the faith of the Government and on the Constitution. And look where it got them!

Let us return to Article 311 and to Punjab. Apart from suspension without framing charges, men were suspended on the most trivial charges by ministers; sadistic child-ministers pulling the wings off flies. The punishment inflicted in the end was

a minor one; but the period of suspension could not, under the rules, be treated as duty and the unfortunate victim got only suspension allowance for the whole period of his suspended animation. Article 311 did nothing for him.

The worst obscenity was the deliberate framing of false charges, then suspension, followed by a protracted enquiry which somehow never got off the ground. Article 311 sat as a silent spectator.

No, I do not blame the services for being demoralized. Those who could pull strings, were deputed to the Centre but the vast majority had to grin and bear their humiliation. One of the portfolios allotted to me was Home. This covered the police, and these poor devils had taken a worse beating than even the I.A.S. As soon as I appraised the situation I made a quick tour of all the districts and in each I said the same things. "Justice will be done, there will be no witch hunting, and no digging up of the past. Your future depends on how you serve now, not on what you did under Lachman Singh Gill or anyone else. Now get on with the job."

They got on. Within a couple of months the civil services were again in the proud position of being amongst the best in the country. I asked much of them and they never let me down. It required real toughness to bounce back from a near knock-out in this fashion; but then the Punjabi is tough!

The bumper cotton crop in Ferozepur was attacked by insects and Gyan Singh Kahlon, the other Adviser who was in charge of agriculture, decided to go in for aerial spraying on an extensive scale. The insecticide used was extremely poisonous so that it was imperative not to enter a sprayed field for at least an hour after the spraying. Thousands of leaflets were distributed giving the necessary instructions and, in addition, the Agriculture Department personnel went from village to village emphasizing the precautions that had to be taken. Nevertheless, the canny Punjabi farmer insisted on entering his field immediately after the plane had finished, to see whether the insects had died. They had. So had he, in nearly forty cases. I was on tour in Ferozepur district at the time and when I was told that a deputation of farmers wished to meet me, I prepared for the worst—when people die, it is always the Government's fault. I gave them a time and they rolled up in

due course. They did not say a single word about the forty dead men; all they wanted was more planes so that the spraying could be finished quicker. I promised to plead their case with Gyan Singh.

Then came a drought and with it the typically Punjabi pastime of stealing water out of turn. There were a few murders and I agreed to make the Punjab Armed Constabulary available to Gyan Singh for patrolling the canals. Before they set out I took the precaution of disarming them and giving a few instructions: If water was seen in a field which had no right to be irrigated at the time, the *zamindar* was to be interviewed with the help of the broad police belt, which, in such circumstances, is an excellent persuader. My instructions were faithfully, even enthusiastically, carried out, and the water thefts stopped. A few days later Chavan, then Home Minister at the Centre, came to Ferozepur and asked me to meet him at the aerodrome. I put two and two together and went, anticipating trouble. To my surprise he said that the Punjabis were full of praise for me, on the ground that I had saved the crop. He asked, with a twinkle in his eye, what I had done to deserve such popularity. I told him. I do not think people anywhere else would have looked beyond the belts and given thanks for a crop that *had* been saved.

There were three priorities in the Punjab of 1968 as I saw the situation; to restore the morale of the services, to restore law and order (which had reached a new low) and to ensure the holding of fair and free elections. The Governor, Dr Pavate, agreed with me. What is more important, he gave me a free hand, and I went to work. Once the morale of the services was restored, the rest was easy. But I ran into trouble on the eve of the elections. Hardly twelve days before they were to begin, I received a message from L.P. Singh, the Union Home Secretary, asking me, on behalf of the Government of India, to transfer the D.I.G. Jullundar as complaints had been received that he was favouring the Akali Dal. I told L.P. that I had made personal enquiries into the matter and that there was no evidence whatsoever of political interference by the D.I.G. We were very close to the elections and Jullundar range was the most important in Punjab, containing the three vital border districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozepur.

Particular care had to be taken of polling stations on the border, and it was imperative that the D.I.G. should know the area, the people, and the police. His transfer at this stage would be an administrative blunder of the first magnitude, which would be interpreted—correctly—as unwarranted interference in administration merely because a few people desired it. I then told him that I would *not* make the transfer on my own initiative. If this embarrassed anyone, I was prepared to go on leave immediately. If the Government of India wanted the transfer they should issue a specific order to me on *their* responsibility and I would carry it out.

The Governor was kept informed throughout and he agreed with my stand. Ultimately the transfer was not made and I did not go on leave.

As election temperatures rose there were visits by V.I.Ps and hectic canvassing. That was all in the day's work but I made it clear—more than once—that neither Government resources nor Government machinery could be associated with electioneering in any way. S.C. Sarkar, Editor of *The Searchlight* in Bihar wrote to me enclosing a cutting of their editorial for 15 January 1969.

The editorial reads, in part:

“Correct Stand.”

“Since the first general election there has been persistent demand in the country that Ministers should not utilise the resources of the State to carry on election propaganda for their party. But the Congress, which was in power at the Centre and in the States, turned a deaf ear to this demand. When the non-Congress parties came to power in certain States and their Ministers also started utilising the governmental resources for furthering their party campaign the subject assumed an urgency and even New Delhi began to realise that the misuse of powers was a game at which two could play. So far as the people are concerned, they are equally opposed to Congress as well as non-Congress Ministers misusing the resources of the State to campaign for their party candidates in elections. The first ever step in response to the public demand was taken recently by the West Bengal Governor, Mr Dharam Vira, who decided that except for the Prime Minister no other Minister

visiting the State for the purpose of electioneering would be accorded V.I.P. treatment by the Government. Why the Prime Minister was made an exception was not explained. After all, there is no difference between her and, say, the Deputy Prime Minister when they go for canvassing votes for congress candidates.

However, it was left to the Punjab Government to take a correct stand in the matter. In a statement made to the Press on Monday, the Adviser to the Punjab Governor, Mr Noronha, made it abundantly clear that the Government was not giving any V.I.P. treatment either to the Prime Minister or to any other Central Minister now touring the State for election purposes. He said that the State Government had not even arranged a car for the Prime Minister, now on election tour of Punjab. Of course Mrs Gandhi will have no dearth of cars for her tours. But the point is that even after two decades of independence, we have not yet developed democratic standards in many spheres. In Bihar as also in Uttar Pradesh, the Governor's regimes have placed all the resources of the State at the disposal of Central Ministers, who are visiting these States for improving the prospects of Congress candidates. In Lucknow, a spokesman of the U.P. Government has brazen-facedly admitted it. Government planes and vehicles have been placed at their disposal to be used by them as they like. It may be that some Central Ministers also do some minor official work but there is no denying the fact they are touring these States principally for electioneering purposes . . . . A good example has been set by the Punjab Government. Both the Governor, Mr Pavate, and the Adviser, Mr Noronha, deserve to be congratulated for the initiative . . ."

The real point of these two incidents is not that I was a hell of a fellow but that—mark carefully—nothing whatever happened to me because of them. And nothing is what usually happens, contrary to popular belief amongst government servants, when they act correctly. I even got a Padma Bhushan after my retirement!

The elections were held without incident and as soon as the results were declared—the Congress failed to get a majority or to form a government—I handed over charge and returned to Madhya Pradesh.

# an affectionate tribute to Punjab

## II

The time to write about any place is exactly two months after arrival. Earlier is too early; everything is new, wonderful, a splash of colour, confused, exciting, inchoate. Later is too late; *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, greys and blacks and never a gash of sky in between.

I have now been in Punjab exactly two months and this is, therefore, the last and perhaps the only true word on Punjab. Unbandage your eyes and prepare for education.

The Punjabis are the ten lost tribes of Israel. Nothing else could account for their thirst for travel. If you want to take a real census of Hoshiarpur, Jullundar and Ludhiana districts, you will have to do your counting in the U.S., Britain and Canada, because that is where most of them are. There are more Punjabis outside Punjab than in it.

This factor should be taken into account when assessing public opinion in Punjab because it is likely to be considerably influenced by Punjabi opinion from Birmingham and Bhopal, from Wisconsin and Varanasi, Quebec and Quilon. (The Punjabi keeps in touch with his relations wherever they may be.) Elsewhere in India you can discuss Nixon's victory with a shrug, but not in Punjab. The person before whom you shrug is likely to have a cousin who either shook hands with Nixon or heaved a rock at him. There is a strong feeling about both Republicans and Democrats here and it would be unwise to ignore it. I won five rupees by betting on Nixon and had to listen to twenty minutes of enlightened anti-Nixon opinion before I was paid.

One would expect the Punjabi to be cosmopolitan and blasé. Nothing could be farther from the truth. At heart he is still the farm boy from Khubban who grows the best cotton in India and the best wheat and the best rice and—the list is inexhaustible. It does not make the slightest difference that he happens to be an industrial magnate whose overdraft any bank would welcome, he still has his roots in the rich earth of his home village. And this, I think, accounts for his vitality. He falls, he burns, but he rises again, reborn like the Phoenix, drawing new life from the good earth to which he is inextricably linked.

I have never, of course, seen a Punjabi looking with love-lorn eyes at his wife but I have caught him unawares looking at his land and I imagine the expression must be the same. It is this vitality derived from the soil that makes the Punjabi a great builder and rebuilder. On and off for three thousand years (before that, is only hearsay) Punjab has been destroyed and rebuilt and destroyed and reborn. There is no old Punjab—there is only and always a young Punjab, a brash young Punjab that makes mistakes but never the mistake of growing tired and wise and . . . useless.

In 1947 and 1948, Punjab had for all practical purposes ceased to exist. Destroyed villages and desolate fields and human misery stretching in endless lines of refugees on the march from horizon to horizon—that was all. Four years later Punjab was exporting more grain than it had done before Partition. Last year in forty-five days 1,400,000 tons of wheat were procured from only eleven districts. It was literally an inundation of golden grain from which exhausted and harassed officials were tempted to flee. It was the Phoenix reborn.

There are two reasons for the Punjabi's success in this colossal task of rebuilding. One is his vitality, of the earth, earthy; the other is his willingness to experiment and invest and his reluctance to keep capital idle, resulting in the rapid turnover of funds that is so essential to prosperity.

The burying of earthen pots full of money is unknown—or almost unknown—in Punjab. A man who makes money from his farm thinks first of all about the farm and invests what is needed for its improvement. Then he thinks about consumer goods, a sewing machine for his wife, clothes, good food and a good house, and finally he thinks of the Government and patronizes the nearest bar. The Government of Punjab should be grateful for his indulgence. The excise revenue from liquor is—hold your breath—Rs 28 crores per annum.

The third and perhaps the most important reason for the Punjabi's prosperity is Mrs Punjabi. She forces him into an unending battle to out-Jones the Joneses. Which reminds me of the tycoon who was asked why he worked so hard. He said, "I want to see if there is any income which my wife cannot live beyond."

While on the subject of Mrs Punjabi, let me say, with the

courage born of anonymity, that Punjabi women are not beautiful. Beauty can only make itself apparent by comparison with ugliness. There is no such thing as an ugly Punjabi woman—and, therefore, there can be no such thing as a beautiful Punjabi woman. That is my final word and let there be no argument—at least not until I see the next beautiful Punjabin.

When I leave Punjab I will carry with me not a coherent, continuous, sequential memory but a series of vignettes. Many of them will not be the conventional ones—my vignettes will be offbeat snoopings that have carved a little niche in my mind. A distant shot of Anandpur Sahib framed against the sky, tender and remote and detached. A robust borderer describing his bumper crop as a *do katal ki phasal*, a two-murders crop, meaning thereby that it was enough to commit two murders and get away with them. A cold winter's morning and the partridge rocketing from cotton fields with an exuberant crowd of Rai Sikhs beating them out and a policeman telling me in properly awe-struck tones: "These are the only people in Punjab tough enough to deny an investigating policeman a cot to sit on." A lookout post in a magnificent pipal tree on the frontier and a couple of *jawans* keeping ceaseless vigil and a line of camel and bullock carts on the Grand Trunk Road, reproducing a scene three thousand years old . . .

## X. MY MASTERS

After my return from Punjab I took two months leave which I spent in a thoroughly irresponsible manner wandering by bus and train and car over my old haunts, shooting and fishing. I enjoyed myself but all good things have to end and my leave was no exception to the rule. Govind Narain Singh and his S.V.D. government had fallen; the Raja of Sarangarh, persuaded by Govind Narain Singh's magic to leave the Congress and join the S.V.D. at precisely the time when a blind man could see that it was breaking up, lasted thirteen days as Chief Minister; and Congress with the help of a splurge of *Ayazams*, again led by Govind Narain Singh, was back in power headed by Shyama Charan Shukla, the son of Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla about whom I have written earlier. He did not want me as Chief Secretary but he created an ex-cadre post, the Controller General of State Income and Expenditure, on the scale of the Chief Secretary and appointed me to it.

The post of Chief Secretary is one that calls for, above all things, a personal equation with the Chief Minister. The two have to work as parts of one whole, the upper and lower jaws, as it were. The Chief Secretary must be able to think with the Chief Minister's mind, so that he can act on his own when the need arises, in the full assurance that he is acting in accord with the line of thought of his principal. The Chief Minister on his part has to have the most complete confidence in the Chief Secretary. None of this is possible unless they are both on the same wavelength. It follows therefore that the Chief Minister must be free to choose his Chief Secretary without

niggling questions of seniority vitiating the issue. I did not have a grievance because I was not made Chief Secretary or because a junior was. On the other hand I was grateful to Shyama Charan for creating a post which would spare me from financial loss, although I personally would still have had no grievance if this had not been done.

Having got that off my chest, let me say that my three years as Controller General were amongst the happiest of my life. I had morning office throughout the year. I went punctually at 11 a.m. (the opening hour for the area where my office was located) and returned home equally punctually at 11-30 a.m., leaving no arrears. But in January 1972 Shyama Charan Shukla was eased out to make room for P.C. Sethi. Then came the general elections and after some months I was sent for and told that I was to be Chief Secretary. I indicated my reluctance bluntly. I had already done about five years as Chief Secretary and now I had hardly three years to go before retirement. No chief secretary should hold the post for more than five years, or else he stamps too much of himself into the administration. Nor should anyone be appointed who has less than three years to serve, because he tends to mark time for his retirement. I pointed out all this, but was overruled. Twenty-four hours later I was back in my old room in the Secretariat, the room I had vacated in 1968.

So much for chief secretaries and the dice that govern their destinies. The real purpose of this chapter is to talk of their masters, the chief ministers, instead. I served as Chief Secretary under three—D.P. Mishra, Govind Narain Singh and P.C. Sethi—and with all three I was fortunate enough to establish the kind of relationship without which smooth working is not possible, a relationship of mutual trust. With all three I passed through difficult times; with D.P. Mishra, famine, widespread student trouble and the Bastar firing; with Govind Narain Singh the perpetual tensions of the S.V.D. and the government employees strike; with P.C. Sethi, repeated opposition attempts, egged on by dissident Congressmen, to create law and order situations. In spite of all this there was never any weakening of trust on either side; on the other hand, external tensions built up a kind of intimacy between us which, if I were not afraid of presuming too much, I would call

friendship.

D.P. Mishra knew that I referred to him in private as "the sea-green incorruptible" after Carlyle's discription of Robespierre. As far as I know, he did not resent it. But he got more than his own back on me when I needled him for praise of my Hindi. I said, "Sir, I hope you've noticed the improvement in my Hindi." He nodded gravely. "Yes I've noticed it." Then he added "The only trouble is that reading your Hindi has almost destroyed *mine*." Hindi was the State language and most of our work was done in it. I cheated sometimes by writing briefly on the note sheet "*Meri rai sanlagn note me prastut hai* (My opinion is in the attached note)." The attached note was in English. But I was and am a dedicated exponent of the use of Hindi in states where it is the mother tongue, and in the Centre. You cannot have a nation without a national language; and being fond of English, I hate to see it being murdered in the usage of today. Mishraji wrote the kind of Hindi which *could* have become the national language—simple, terse, unafraid of borrowing from Urdu or English. He used *afsar* (officer), *ingineer* (engineer), and *barkhast* (dismiss) without qualms, in spite of the fact that his *Krishnayan* is one of the all-time greats in modern Hindi literature.

He was the idol of the services, just, strong and with a crystal clear mind. It rarely took more than ten minutes for him to understand even the most complicated file; and every government servant could be sure of his support if he had acted in good faith. On at least two occasions I myself got that support, when, in my opinion it was politically undesirable for him to give it. The first concerned a very eminent Sarvodaya worker, second only to Jayaprakash Narayan in the mid-sixties, who became a nuisance in the western part of the state. He was working amongst the tribals there and tribals take things literally. He convinced them that they should insist on their rights; they included the neighbour's goat and his wife and freedom from arrest amongst those rights. I permitted the Collector to detain him under the Defence of India Rules, without obtaining Mishraji's orders. There was a devil of a row on an all-India basis. I frankly admitted that I had been unaware of the gentleman's eminence and suggested that he be released. Mishraji said, "No. That would amount to reversing

your decision and a sign that I lacked faith in you. Let him remain in jail for a month or so, then release him yourself, without referring the matter to me." He paused for a second, "Like you did when you detained him."

The second occasion arose during a Vidhan Sabha debate in which I was personally under vicious and violent attack on the allegation that I had engineered the death of the ex-ruler of Bastar. It did not bother me unduly because the allegation was entirely false, and I told Mishraji that it would be advisable not to answer it when he replied to the debate; any defence of me might draw the attack on to himself. He looked up expressionlessly and said nothing. But most of his reply was devoted to a brilliant and sometimes impassioned defence of his Chief Secretary. And, as I had forecast, the opposition promptly switched their attack to him: But it is things like this which distinguish the men who are fit to rule from those who merely want to rule. I could not help remembering a complete contrast, T.T. Krishnamachari and H.M. Patel in the Mundhra case. There, T.T. had thrown Patel to the wolves!

When I first became Mishraji's Chief Secretary he used to ring me up frequently between eight and nine at night. I think people had told him that I was far from being a teetotaller and he wanted to see for himself whether I was in working condition after dark. Presumably he was satisfied, one way or the other, because the phone calls ceased after some weeks, and he maintained more reasonable business hours thereafter. A couple of years later he had to send for me and the I.G. Police at midnight, in an emergency. The I.G. gave me a *paan* in the car and I was chewing it when we arrived at Mishraji's house. He finished his business with us and then, when we were leaving, he called me aside. "I'm sorry to have disturbed you so late at night, but there's really no need to have a *paan* when you come to me." He knew that I did not usually indulge in *paan* and he must have thought I had taken it to disguise the odour of Black Knight. I disabused him of the impression. "The *paan* was an accident, Sir. I wouldn't dream of trying to hide anything from you!" He laughed and the matter ended.

While I am on the subject of drink, I must confess that the hypocritical attitude of my country towards it gets on my

nerves. It is bad to drink if people know you drink, but secret drinking—which people get to know about even quicker—is alright. And every person who drinks is a drunkard. My own attitude (which I have never attempted to conceal) to liquor is that I can take it or leave it. However, I infrequently leave it. Which reminds me of a story related by P.C. Sethi at a Cabinet meeting, possibly in my defence. Birbal's detractors told the Emperor Akbar that he was fond of his glass and one day he agreed to go with them and catch Birbal redhanded at a party. When they arrived the party was in full swing. Birbal greeted the Emperor with every courtesy and seated him, after which the cup bearer arrived and offered his wares. Apart from *sharab* (liquor) there are nine other names in Urdu for the same thing. Birbal asked what was being served and the cup bearer gave one of the other names. Birbal took a glass and Akbar joined him. After a while the cup bearer came again, and again they had a glass, with a different name. This was repeated a third time. But when the cup bearer came a fourth time with a fourth name, Birbal, who was now feeling the effects, said "You lie. This is *sharab*, it intoxicates, take it away!" I rather spoilt the effect of the story by murmuring "He must have had a weak head, there were still six names and six glasses to go before they reached *sharab*."

Mishraji's attitude to administration was refreshingly practical. He always wanted an honest opinion from his subordinates, even if it was unpalatable. In return he expected, and rightly, loyal implementation of even unpalatable orders. "It is your job to advise, it is mine to decide, and the decision is binding on you." An officer who had an appointment with him was never kept waiting because "a waste of his time is a waste of public money." He gave pride of place to the maintenance of law and order, explaining "The genius of our country lies in the creation of wealth. What is required is the safety in which that genius can develop, not dictation as to how it should develop. Every great and good government in India from Chandragupta onwards acted on this fundamental truth." Incidentally it was Mishraji who coined the phrase "a holiday from planning" during the development of his hypothesis that inflation was largely due to the Plans, which of necessity involved spending first and relying on increased production

later, to recoup the expenditure. It amused me considerably to watch the Government of India violently rejecting the suggestion on paper and following it in practice, for at least two years!

Curiously enough, while Mishraji could pick out officers with an unerring eye, he was a poor judge of politicians. Everyone he selected as an aide let him down sooner or later. Or perhaps that is a behavioral norm amongst politicians. On second thoughts, it may not be; no one let down Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla. Possibly Mishraji's real trouble was that in spite of his greatness he never saw people as people but only as cogs in a machine. It is not for nothing that he was called "the iron man." Iron is cold.

If D.P. Mishra was the iron man, Govind Narain Singh was just the opposite, the human man, with more than a touch of the *enfant terrible* about him. The day after the debacle I went to Mishraji to say goodbye and ask whether I could be of any help. He was all alone, the house was quiet, no hordes of visitors, no rush of work. We chatted for some minutes, then I discovered he had no car. The man who had given permits to hundreds of people for cars had no car. He smiled wryly, "I suppose it's too late to get one now." I said, "I don't think so, may I try to get you a permit?" He flared up at once. "Do you think I'm going to ask for favours?" I soothed him. "You needn't do a thing, you needn't enter into the picture, I'll do everything on your behalf." At last he was persuaded but as I was leaving he said, warningly, "Remember, no favours!"

I went to Govind Narain Singh and told him that Mishraji had no car and was in need of a Fiat. I also made it clear that I was acting on my own initiative and not on his request. Govind Narain Singh looked sourly at me. "I had a better opinion of you, Noronha. Did you have to ask my permission for such an obvious thing? Give him a permit for whatever car he wants and see that he gets it immediately." Mishraji got his Fiat within twenty-four hours.

Govind Narain Singh had a first-class brain. But no one who saw him acting as he sometimes did, would ever have believed it. We once had an argument as to whether a tiger, struck or surprised sharply from behind, would rush away or turn and attack. I thought the latter, he insisted on the former. Soon

afterwards we happened to be in Kanha Kisli Sanctuary and I suggested we take a drive after dinner to see the animals. He agreed. We set out in a jeep with me driving. A couple of miles from the rest house we came upon a tiger lying on the bank of a *nala* hardly ten yards from the forest road, immersed in whatever thoughts tigers think. He took not the slightest notice of us. I stopped the jeep, switched off the headlights, and kept the spot on him. A few seconds later I discovered I was minus Govind Narain Singh; he had slipped soundlessly away. Then the tiger gave a great shriek, exactly like a child that is suddenly frightened, and streaked away. Govind Narain Singh stood up laughing in the circle of the spotlight beam. "I told you they rush away. Did you see?" He had stalked up behind the tiger and slapped its bottom. To this day he will not admit how idiotically he behaved. "The tiger's impulse was predictable" he says, "and nothing that is predictable is dangerous."

Yet this was the same man who could on occasion exhibit a subtlety of mind that was quite astonishing. During the 1967 elections he was contesting from a seat adjacent to that allotted to a Muslim Congressman to whom he was personally opposed. He took the opportunity of canvassing for him, unasked, and when the loaded question "What have you to say about cow slaughter?" was flung at him he replied honestly, deliberately, and with malicious forethought, "I am in favour of it. If you don't eat the cow, the cow will end by eating you and your children," and he went on to expound. The candidate was a Muslim . . . he lost. I have no doubt that Govind Narain Singh honestly held these views. He merely picked the time and the place and the opportunity to voice them when they would do the most damage to the candidate. This type of subtlety one would hardly expect from a man who slaps a tiger on the bottom, just to prove a theory!

Govind Narain Singh agreed with the Emperor Jehangir—Hindustan was a high spirited horse that needed a good rider. But he put it differently. In his inimitable way he paraphrased the Ramayana. When Sri Rama was going into exile Bharat asked him for guidance. "I have no experience of ruling, I am young, what shall I do?" Instead of giving him a lecture on kingship, Sri Rama gave his *paduka* (wooden slippers) to place on the throne. The hint was sufficient; India is a country where

slippers are used to discipline people as well as puppies. As a result, Bharat ruled so well and so firmly that the real Ram-rajya was during the period of his regency, and when Sri Rama returned the country was richer and more powerful than it had ever been before. There was an essential similarity between this theory of administration—the firm rider—and Mishraji's theory of law and order being the crux of administration. Mishraji, however, was in a position to implement his theory; all that Govind Narain Singh could do was to expound it to the Coordination Committee of the S.V.D., who were busy with more important things than administration.

Nevertheless, in the very narrow field that was left to him for independent action (things without political significance and these are few) he did his best. He saw the crying need to tap groundwater resources and went all out to do so. A tube-wells organization was set up and driven relentlessly until it really and truly produced results. There were no funds; he decided, most improperly and against my written advice, to give export permits for *gulabi gram* in return for donations at a specified rate, to the Chief Minister's Scarcity Relief Fund, and *all* the money went into tube-wells, more than a crore. It was typical of the man that having once decided what he wanted to do, he gave his orders precisely and briefly; and left the details in my hands without the petty nagging that passes for supervision amongst politicians. He said "Make sure that the money goes *only* into tube-wells." I did so by working out a method of crediting the donations directly into the accounts head of the Chief Minister's Scarcity Relief Fund, with no one handling cash. Thereafter it was transferred by degrees into the account of the tube-wells organization as and when required. With Central aid and loans from banks, that one crore produced four crores worth of tube-wells. It will also produce, if my guess is correct, a rocket from the Bhavé Commission (set up under the Commissions of Enquiry Act) which is looking into the matter of *gulabi chana* exports under Mishraji as well as the S.V.D. government. Justice Bhavé's report has already reached the Government and will have been published by the time this book appears in print, so I am not anticipating—much.

The Constitution empowers the Centre to impose restrictions

on the movement of goods and produce between one state and another; the states have no such powers. During Mishraji's first tenure as Chief Minister the 1967 elections cropped up and funds were needed to fight them. A ban was imposed on the export of *gulabi gram* outside Madhya Pradesh—quite illegally—and only those who contributed to Congress funds at a specified rate per quintal were given export permits. Needless to say, the major part of the money so collected reached Congress hands but not the Congress coffers because there was no system, no procedure and no check. When the S.V.D. government took over, the Jana Sangh component was very keen on instituting a judicial enquiry into the affair but Govind Narain Singh successfully stalled them; I have mentioned earlier his curious solicitude for Congress interests. Later on he adopted the same method to raise funds for tube-wells, but the money really did go into tube-wells. That, however, does not detract from the illegality of the export ban itself.

Also during Mishraji's first tenure, and just before the 1967 elections, enormous amounts of money were spent on scarcity relief works in Damoh district which covered the constituency of the then Revenue Minister, K.B.L. Guru. The Revenue Department deals with scarcity relief. Most of the money was misappropriated at various levels. In this matter Govind Narain Singh had to give in to Jana Sangh importunity and K.N. Nagarkatti, a retired I.C.S. officer, was appointed under the Commissions of Enquiry Act to hold the enquiry. He completed the work expeditiously and placed the major responsibility on Guru and Mishraji. Govind Narain Singh fought a superb and subtle delaying action with the result that nothing concrete was done about the Nagarkatti report during the S.V.D. regime. Nor did the Shyama Charan ministry resurrect the skeletons of either *gulabi chana* or scarcity relief. That was left to the Sethi ministry.

In 1973, for reasons which have never been clear to me, the Sethi government ordered a fresh enquiry under the Commissions of Enquiry Act into *gulabi chana*, scarcity relief in Damoh and, for good measure, a relatively minor misappropriation relating to purchase of mats to be used in primary schools as seats. This last occurred during the S.V.D. period. Justice Bhawe was placed in charge of all three enquiries, and

Madhya Pradesh saw the phenomenon of one Congress government wholeheartedly cooperating in action designed to discredit a previous Congress government. I had the melancholy satisfaction of being right but over-ruled by three governments, those of Mishraji, Govind Narain Singh and P.C. Sethi; the first two when I pointed out the illegality of the ban on export of *gulabi chana*, and the third when I opposed a fresh judicial enquiry. Some people think before acting; others think after acting; by and large post-Independence governments do not think. The Bhavé report will figure largely in Opposition propaganda during the 1976 elections.

In quickness of perception and ability to grasp the essentials of a problem, Govind Narain Singh was in the same class as Mishraji. Like Mishraji he also decided quickly and stuck to his decisions. But he put his ideas across through an uncanny gift for persuasion, whereas Mishraji got his own way by virtue of a dominating personality. It was very difficult to say "no" to Govind Narain Singh; Mishraji never gave his colleagues the opportunity to say "no." Cabinet meetings under Mishraji seldom lasted more than half an hour; he knew what he wanted and he got it. In Govind Narain Singh's time they dragged on for hours; but I noticed that in the end he also got what he wanted. The only difference was that he made the other ministers believe *they* had got what they wanted. There was something to be said for his method because it left no residue of bitterness behind. It did, however, add to the Chief Secretary's work because he could never forecast what exactly the Chief Minister had already decided in advance—and this Chief Minister's decisions were certainly taken in advance of the Cabinet meeting, just as Mishraji's had been. It helps a lot to know what the decision is going to be; one can draft the Council Order while the discussion is still going on, and so save time. Govind Narain Singh could have done much for the State if only he had led a team instead of a mob.

Ability, energy, drive—those qualities he had, but the overall impression he left on those with whom he came in contact was humanness. He was a man first and a Chief Minister afterwards, treating people as human beings, liking people and being liked in return, dealing with them from ground level and not from Olympia. When I went to Punjab I got permission

to retain the government bungalow allotted to me in Bhopal and left my wife and family behind. A few days after I had gone, there was persistent hooting at the gate very early in the morning. My wife came out and found Govind Narain Singh there, in a jeep. He asked "Is everything all right, are there any problems?" She reassured him and he went away, declining the offer of a cup of tea. Thereafter, on an average of once a week until I returned, he repeated the visit for a brief five minutes each time, just to make sure that she was being looked after. When he resigned, he was the only Chief Minister I ever heard of to go to the Secretariat and thank all the government servants for the way in which they had served him. He was visibly moved when he said "You are government servants and owe nothing to ministers. Nevertheless you served me far and beyond the call of duty and I will always be grateful to you." There are few ministers who realise that government servants owe them nothing and who are grateful for loyal service willingly rendered; the vast majority take service for granted, and get the kind of service they deserve. But Govind Narain Singh was well served.

It was during his time that I lost one of the many battles I have lost in my career. The Jana Sangh were very keen to reduce the retirement age of state government servants from fifty-eight to fifty-five, ostensibly for reasons of economy. I pointed out that the persons to be retired were holding senior posts which would have to be filled; the only economy would arise from leaving the consequential juniormost vacancy unfilled. This could as well be done without reducing the retirement age. Administratively, a sudden reduction in the retirement age creates a large number of vacancies at senior levels and causes disruption. If the age had to be reduced, let the reduction be staggered—first fifty-seven then fifty-six then fifty-five. My arguments were countered by Saklecha, the Jana Sangh Deputy Chief Minister, with the claim that greater employment opportunities would ensue. I said they would not if vacancies were left unfilled; and if even the junior vacancies were filled, there would be little economy. But I was butting my head against a stone wall. The real reason for reducing the retirement age suddenly, whoever does it, is to get rid of the older cadre of government servants who are close enough to

retirement to be independent; their successors can be selected without regard to seniority and on the basis of commitment to the party in power. The simplest and most honest way to achieve the same result would be to make commitment a condition of government service, enforceable under the Government Servants Conduct Rules. Govind Narain Singh gave me no support; the finer points of administration did not interest him. And the retirement age was duly reduced to fifty-five. Incidentally, when the Congress came back into power, they raised the retirement age to fifty-eight, thereby ensuring the commitment of those who got another lease of life. One of my few heroes was my father who died when I was fifteen; he used to say "look after your sword and your sword will look after you." The politician has never realized that his real and only sword is the Services, nor has he learned to either look after or use it.

I called on Govind Narain Singh immediately after he took the oath of office as Chief Minister and asked permission to speak frankly. He said, "You will anyway, but the permission is granted."

I placed my fountain pen on the table and said, "This pen cost me one rupee eight annas. But it is mine, not the Government's and only I can tell it what to write. Secondly there is no reason at all to continue me as Chief Secretary if you want someone else."

For once he became grave. "As long as I am Chief Minister no one will give orders to your pen. And if at any time I want another Chief Secretary, I will tell you so myself." He kept his word absolutely regarding the pen, and he never did want another Chief Secretary as long as I was holding the post.

The iron man, the human man, and now—the gentleman. Prakash Chand Sethi was exactly that. Mishraji could be the Judge of Christ "It is expedient for the good of the people that this just man should die." Even Govind Narain Singh could be regretfully ruthless on occasion. But I cannot imagine P.C. Sethi being anything but kind, and decent, qualities which are singularly out of place, if they exist in any great degree, when one is a politician. The Governor, Satya Narain Sinha, who was certainly a politician, cast himself in the role of Sethi's mentor as soon as he became Chief Minister and told

him a story to indicate the attitude he should take with the services. A new bride entered her husband's house for the first time and was greeted with a resounding slap by her mother-in-law. Tearfully she asked how she had offended. The mother-in-law said, "You haven't offended yet. That's just to teach you what will happen if you do offend." When I became Chief Secretary there were eight Class I officers under suspension, on relatively trivial charges. By degrees I got Sethi to realize that the services were not daughters-in-law and after that the situation eased.

In Independent India, governors were originally drawn from the ranks of retired politicians and retired service men. So long as this practice continued things went fairly smoothly. Then they began to be drawn from the ranks of "kamraj" politicians and the fat was fairly in the fire; the "kamraj" politician wears a permanent chip on his shoulder and can never reconcile himself to being "kamraj." Sinha started me on my second term as Chief Secretary with the bald statement that *he* had selected me for the post. I thought to myself, "Uh-huh, here we go for barbed wire" but there was nothing much I could do except to sit down in the saddle and hope my horse would carry me over, because Sethi in his innocence thought the Chief Secretary was selected by the Chief Minister. So did I. And since I have never believed in divided loyalties, the Governor soon came to regret his choice. If it had been his choice. It was an educative experience for both of us; he was the first Governor of his type I had met, and I was possibly the first civil servant of my type that he had met. D.P. Mishra or Govind Narain Singh would have coped with him easily; but Sethi was a gentleman.

The trouble about our Constitution is that it was framed for a mature democracy in which conventions and practices developed over hundreds of years carry more weight than the written word. Everything in England is technically done by the king, who would not dream of doing anything at all. Here, at state level, the executive power vests in the Governor (Article 154) and the executive action of the Government of a State must be expressed to be taken in the name of the Governor (Article 166). Furthermore the Chief Minister has to communicate to the Governor all decisions of the Council of Ministers,

furnish such information as may be called for, and send for a Council decision any matter which the Governor desires to be so sent (Article 167). The biggest bundle of dynamite is Article 164 according to which (a) the Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor (b) ministers shall be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister, and (c) the ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor.

If taken literally these provisions put a tidy package of power in the Governor's hands. No one however took them literally, until Satya Narain Sinha came along. He dropped several hints that important files should come to him before orders were passed; to all of which I turned a forgetful ear. Then he must have mentioned the matter in Delhi because I got a letter from L.P. Singh the Home Secretary, drawing my attention to the constitutional provisions I have quoted, and suggesting that they should be followed. I wrote back informing him that all important cases were naturally Council cases, to be decided by the Council of Ministers as a whole and not by any individual minister; that the agenda for every Council meeting along with the relevant précis was sent in advance to the Governor; that Council decisions were similarly communicated to him; and that this procedure provided him with ample opportunity to keep in touch with day to day administration so that he could decide for himself what information or case or cases to send for under Article 167. There was no reply.

The only time I had any real difficulty with Sethi over a service matter was in the case of R.S. Khanna, the Sales Tax Commissioner. The story is worth relating because it illustrates how popular governments function in the conditions of our democracy. Section 2 of the Madhya Pradesh Sales Tax Act is susceptible to different interpretations. Khanna's predecessors had adopted one, but after examining the matter he came to the conclusion that a different interpretation was in fact correct. Incidentally, this different interpretation would have brought in an additional revenue of two to three crores of rupees, but at the cost of a fair amount of hardship to the trading community. He did not, however, immediately enforce his own interpretation. The matter was referred to the Finance department and discussed exhaustively with the Finance Minister.

S.N. Mushran, and with the Finance Secretary. No one disagreed with him. When preliminary action to implement the interpretation was taken, the traders, quite predictably, made a concerted attack on the Sales Tax Commissioner with no holds barred. As soon as this happened Mushran slipped neatly out of the picture, leaving Khanna to hold the baby as best he could; *he* had done everything, the tacit concurrence of the Finance department was swept under the carpet in the teeth of the Finance Secretary's protests. In fact the only person who stood by the truth was Pasricha, the Finance Secretary. The Deputy Minister for Finance in particular (Shekhar) was vociferous in demanding Khanna's head. Much to my surprise, the matter suddenly erupted at a Council meeting towards the end of December 1973, without being on the agenda at all. I sensed that considerable propaganda had already been done against Khanna amongst the ministers; he was being accused of deliberately disobeying the Government's orders, which was as far from the truth as the silent Mushran was from speech. There was even a demand for his immediate suspension. I managed to get over this hurdle by suggesting that a categorical order should issue from the Government over-ruling his interpretation and directing him to follow the previous one, while I examined the case to see whether there had been any flouting of the Government's orders or policy. Fortunately, my brainwave was accepted, and orders were accordingly issued the same night.

A scapegoat is not demonstrably a scapegoat unless it is sacrificed. Khanna therefore had to be sacrificed if the uproar in the trading community was to be quietened. A couple of days later, as the Chief Minister was leaving on one of his periodic trips to Delhi, his orders were obtained by Shekhar to suspend Khanna. I received them while I was still congratulating myself on having got out of an awkward situation, if not with credit at least without visible scars. The order of suspension was utterly unjust; Khanna had done nothing without the explicit consent of the Finance department; in fact he had actually *done* nothing as yet. After the receipt of the Government's clarification or instructions, but with the previous consent of the Finance Minister, he had written suggesting that the opinion of the Advocate General should be obtained. Shekhar

seized upon this letter as a deliberate defiance of the Government's orders to resume the old interpretation, and managed to put his point of view across to Sethi. I went through the whole file and satisfied myself that the Chief Minister's orders were based on a misapprehension. I sent him a letter by special messenger giving all the facts and asking for reconsideration. I followed this up the next day with a Telex message pointing out that according to the rules, an I.A.S. officer could not be suspended unless charges had been framed against him; and no charges had as yet been framed against Khanna. Sethi replied that his orders were meant to be implemented *after* complying with the regulations and this gave me an obvious way out; I asked the Finance department to draft charges, knowing of course that there was no foundation on which to frame them. In the meantime, Sethi returned from Delhi and I explained the case to him personally, pulling no punches in the process. In situations like this it is not sufficient to state the facts, however forcefully; it is also necessary to suggest a way out. My task was made easier by the all-India Press which had taken up Khanna's case as an example of the victimization of an honest government servant by unscrupulous politicians. Ultimately Khanna wrote a demi-official letter explaining that he had done nothing against the government's orders, the Government accepted the explanation, and the case was closed.

Sethi was imposed by the Centre on Madhya Pradesh. When he became Chief Minister, Shyama Charan Shukla, the outgoing Chief Minister, still had a convincing majority in the Congress Legislature party. D.P. Mishra elected to help Sethi against Shyama Charan and the three corners of the triangle emerged finally as Mishraji plus Sethi versus Shyama. The battle lines were so clearly, even bitterly, drawn that Sethi referred publicly to the ministry he had succeeded as "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" (there were forty ministers in Shyama Charan's government). There are people who are "against the Government" whichever government it may be and there are others who are "for the Government" with the same fine impartiality. Sethi's only supporters at the beginning belonged to the latter category. When he formed a ministry it consisted of Mishra's men and a few who were Chief Minister's

men (any Chief Minister who happened to be in power). "Sethi's men" were conspicuous by their absence. But three years later 'Mishra's men' and "Chief Minister's men" had all merged into Sethi's men, a political transfiguration that astonished everyone intelligent enough to notice it. Sethi had passed through his apprenticeship with flying colours and emerged as a seasoned strategist on the battlefield of politics.

It was fascinating to watch the evolution of the boy into the man, if I may say so with all respect. To begin with he was diffident, unsure of himself, and this made him lean heavily on Mishraji. By easy stages the state came to be ruled by remote control—Mishraji's control. To one who had served under him for so long, the hand of the Master was clearly visible in the posting of officers, the pattern of administration, the reaction to developments. But ruling by remote control is difficult because one has to take decisions on another man's assessment of events; and one has to rely on the other man's reactions being exactly the same as one's own. They never are. That is why Napoleon, who had to rely on Marshal Ney, lost the battle of Waterloo. It was not Ney's fault, it was just that Ney's assessment was different from what Napoleon's would have been. If Ney had pressed home the attack on Wellington at Quatre Bras in the early stages of the battle, there would have been no need for Waterloo. Napoleon must have grown impatient with him; Mishraji grew impatient with Sethi on two counts—because some battles were lost and because he was not willing to concede that his own battle plans may have been defective. As a result he interfered increasingly, and more and more directly, and now it was Sethi who became impatient. Bismarck served the first Kaiser faithfully and laid the foundations of a new and tremendously powerful Germany. But the Kaiser matured too, and Bismarck continued to domineer, with the predictable result that they parted company, an event immortalized in the Punch cartoon "Dropping the Pilot." Sethi grew up. It remained only to drop the pilot.

One of "Mishra's men" in the Sethi Cabinet was Chandra Pratap Tiwari who had originally been in the P.S.P. before joining the Congress. He was honest and sincere but a trifle headstrong, hailing from Vindhya Pradesh which later merged into the new state of Madhya Pradesh in 1956. In the pre-1956

period when Vindhya Pradesh was a separate entity, Birlas had set up a paper plant, the Orient Paper Mill, in that backward and underdeveloped area. The then (Congress) government of Vindhya Pradesh gave the company a lease for extraction of bamboos for a period of twenty years at the rate of Rs 6 per ton and extended it for another ten years in October 1956 by a supplementary agreement. The extension was granted on the very eve of the states' reorganization just before the powers of the Vindhya Pradesh government were handed over to the new Madhya Pradesh government. The rate was reasonable in 1956 but no provision was made for periodical revision as is the normal practice in long-term leases. Consequently, by 1966 Birlas were still paying Rs 6 per ton for their bamboo in the erstwhile Vindhya Pradesh and the non-Birla politicians were howling blue murder. D.P. Mishra constituted a committee with me as the Chairman to examine the whole matter and recommend what rate should be charged to the Orient Paper Mills (a) for bamboo extracted in the former Vindhya Pradesh region covered by the old lease and (b) for bamboo in the rest of the state. We reported that legally no revision was possible for the existing Vindhya Pradesh lease during the period of its validity. For the rest of the state we recommended Rs 30 per ton from 1965 onwards upto 30 June 1968 and Rs 35 per ton from 1 July 1968 based on the existing prices and our forecast of future trends. Neither we, nor anyone else, dreamt that prices would ever rise to the levels of today, but we did recommend a provision for periodic revision in all future contracts or leases. Before orders could be passed on our report Mishraji's government fell. The S.V.D. who succeeded him, carefully froze the case because it was a potential source of disruption, the Socialists and the Jana Sangh-Rajmata axis holding diametrically opposite views. What happened to it during Shyama Charan's stewardship I do not know but Chandra Pratap Tiwari successfully resurrected it when Sethi came to power. The case was processed and brought before the cabinet and a decision was taken to charge Rs 30 per ton from 1 July 1965 to 30 June 1968, Rs 40 per ton from 1 July 1968 to 30 June 1972, and Rs 50 per ton from 1 July 1972 onwards, outside the Vindhya Pradesh lease areas. Some time later Tiwari had an interview with the Prime Minister in which

he apparently offered to send her a note on the subject. Later on, it was sent, with a copy to Sethi. It practically put Sethi in the dock for favouritism to Birla, not directly but by clever implication. Sethi was furious; he saw the shadow of Mishraji behind Tiwari in the whole affair and was bent upon demanding Tiwari's resignation. Other ministers intervened and the matter was smoothed over for the time being but shortly afterwards the Forest portfolio was taken away from Tiwari. A few months later the Council of Ministers was (slightly) reshuffled and Tiwari was finally dropped. Sethi had come of age; and with the dropping of Tiwari he had dropped the pilot as well. Mishraji too ceased to occupy the role of man-behind-the-scenes.

The dropping of Tiwari was not the end of the story. First expectations that there would be a chain reaction of resignations from the ministry were belied. The nettle of danger having been firmly grasped, there was no stinging. Ministers who had been confidently forecasting that Sethi had bitten off more than he could chew were among the first to assure him of their undying loyalty and almost overnight the Cabinet became to a man, "Sethi's man." If, in a future incarnation, politicians are reborn as women, and if they remain true to type, the marriage vows will have to be re-cast.

On an average, Sethi spent the larger part of each month in Delhi, and there was considerable criticism of this practice. But looking back now, I think he was right. The favourite pastime of disgruntled politicians is blackguarding the Chief Minister in Delhi, particularly if he happens to be the Prime Minister's nominee. Most probably they never get to the Prime Minister but they do reach people who are close to her, and the constant propaganda ultimately has its effect. Sethi's periodic trips did much to wash out the mud stains on his image and to this important extent they served a useful, even a State, purpose. If his practice was reprehensible, the fault lies in a system that permits gossip and hearsay to damage a man.

He was always extremely kind to me and our personal relations were cordial. I gave him my honest opinion and I carried out his orders—even against that advice—to the very best of my ability. When the time drew near for my retirement he

asked me to accept an extension. I explained that I had strong views on the subject and refused. The *Times of India* described my exit with admirable brevity (20 May, 1974):

Few functions to bid farewell to retiring civil servants have been as lively as that held in honour of the outgoing Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, Mr R.C.V.P. Noronha, in Bhopal the other day.

"He took the opportunity to give some sound advice to administrative and police officials when he asked them to sink their differences and stand shoulder to shoulder to meet the challenges ahead.

"Being a man of the world, he put his finger on the heart of the matter at once. 'Gentlemen' he declared 'trouble between the administrative and the police officers usually begins with temperamental differences between the wives of the District Magistrate and the District Superintendent of Police. It then travels both up and down the hierarchical ladder. So, gentlemen, if you really want to serve the country, please control your wives.'

"Easier said than done, Mr Noronha, one is tempted to retort. But then the former Chief Secretary of M.P. is known to be capable of doing unusual things. For example, unlike many of his peers in the I.C.S. who will do almost anything to seek extension of service beyond retirement, he is said to have firmly refused repeated offers of extension or re-employment by the State Government.

'It's time for me to go, and I will not stay in service a day longer' he is reported to have remarked before jumping on his motorbike and speeding away.

And so—the end of this book. It has covered thirty-five years of a period that was always difficult, sometimes dark, but never dull; a period of which Horace might almost have been thinking when he wrote:

*Spondet Fortuna multa multis, praestat nemini*—Fortune makes many promises to many and fulfils none.

(*Epistles* I-iv-16)



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R.P. Noronha's career in the I.C.S. started in 1939, and ended in 1974, when he retired as Chief Secretary to the M.P. government. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1975.

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